



United States Department of Agriculture

Research, Education, and Economics
Agricultural Research Service

May 28, 2019

Sent via email

Austin Evers
Executive Director
American Oversight
1030 15th Street, NW
Suite B255
Washington, DC 20005

foia@americanoversight.org

Dear Mr. Evers,

This letter is the final response to your Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to the Research, Education, and Economics (REE) FOIA Office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Your request, dated August 30, 2018, was assigned tracking number 2018-REE-05891-F. In your request, you sought the following records:

All records from the USDA-ARS website, “Your Two Cents” (<https://y2c.arsnet.usda.gov/>), including both employees’ comments and management’s responses. Please provide all responsive records from April 25, 2017, through the date of the search. American Oversight is not asking USDA to release the names of any career employees or managers who have posted on “Your Two Cents.” However, American Oversight would object to the redaction of the names of any political appointees* in the responsive records. * “Political appointee” should be understood as any person who is a Presidential Appointee with Senate Confirmation (PAS), a Presidential Appointee (PA), a non-career SES, any Schedule C employees, or any persons hired under Temporary Non-Career SES Appointments, Limited Term SES Appointments, or Temporary Transitional Schedule C Appointments.

Your request was processed under the FOIA, 5 U.S.C. § 552. A search of the available Your Two Cents (Y2C) data was conducted by the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), Office of Chief Information Officer, Enterprise Application Services Branch. The search located one hundred and three (103) pages of responsive records, portions of which have been withheld under Exemption 6 of the FOIA.

FOIA Exemption 6

Exemption 6 generally is referred to as the “personal privacy” exemption. It provides that the disclosure requirements of FOIA do not apply to “personnel and medical files and similar files the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy.” Application of the exemption involves balancing the public’s interest in disclosure against individuals’ privacy interests.

Office of the Director
Office of Communications
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The information withheld under Exemption 6 consists of names, locations, or other information that may identify the submitters of suggestions to Y2C. This information qualifies as “similar files” because it is information in which individuals have a privacy interest. These submitters have a privacy interest in remaining anonymous, and the public’s interest in learning the identities of these submitters is minimal. Moreover, releasing the information could subject the individuals to unwarranted or unsolicited communications. Since there is a viable privacy interest that would be threatened by disclosure, Exemption 6 authorizes this office to withhold the information. Accordingly, we have determined that the public interest in the information’s release does not outweigh the overriding privacy interests in keeping it confidential.

You may administratively appeal this determination by writing to the Administrator, ARS, USDA, Room 302-A, Jamie L. Whitten Federal Building, 14th & Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250. Your appeal must be postmarked within 90 days of the date of the response to your request. The phrase “FOIA Appeal” should be placed in capital letters on the front of the envelope containing the appeal.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss any aspect of your request, please contact the REE FOIA Office at 301-504-1655 or electronically at REEfoia@ars.usda.gov. You may also reach our FOIA Public Liaison or FOIA Requester Service Center at 301-504-1743 or REEfoia@ars.usda.gov.

Additionally, you may contact the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS) at the National Archives and Records Administration to inquire about its FOIA mediation services. The contact information for OGIS is: Office of Government Information Services, National Archives and Records Administration, 8601 Adelphi Road-OGIS, College Park, Maryland 20740-6001; ogis@nara.gov; 202-741-5770; toll free at 1-877- 684-6448; or facsimile at 202-741-5769.

Sincerely,

JD Wyllie

JD Wyllie
Director
Office of Communications

Enclosure (103 pages)

IdeaTitle	Description	Created Date	Modified Date	Response
Y2C - Put Date on Your Responses	reminder - please put the date of Y2C's response at the beginning of each response. thank you.	8/9/2018	8/9/2018	8/9/2018 - Thank you, we corrected the one we missed.
OPAR form: mode, time, & duration of transportation between foreign airport and hotel in the same city (suburbs/metro area)	Eliminate the requirement to record on the OPAR form (country clearance for foreign travel) how (mode) the traveler will get from the foreign airport to their hotel in the same city (metro area, suburb), the time of day, how long it will take; and also how they will get from their hotel back to the foreign airport, time of day, how long that will take. Instead, require those items only if the traveler will go outside of the arrival city (location of major international airport) or between multiple cities. How can we know, within the same city as the foreign airport, if they will travel by car, taxicab, shuttle, subway, bus, minivan, transportation network company (TNC), or innovative mobility technology company (IMTC/INC), or what time of day that will happen, or duration in hours and minutes?	8/2/2018	8/7/2018	NULL
Vision statement	Transformational research to grow healthy, sustainable communities.	7/30/2018	7/30/2018	NULL
ARS Vision statement	Revolutionary research for a growing world.	7/30/2018	7/30/2018	NULL
Mission statement	ARS is the scientific cornerstone within a community of researchers and practitioners that protect public health and the environment while providing a safe, affordable food supply.	7/30/2018	7/30/2018	NULL
Vision Statement	ARS research leads the Nation and World solving problems for a healthy and sustainable agricultural ecosystem of producers, products and consumers	7/29/2018	7/30/2018	NULL
Mission Statement	The ARS Mission should include the sense of supporting food choice. Our Society includes vegetarians, vegans, meat-lovers, supporters of lab grown meat, those that think insect flours will be important ingredients in the future etc. Our research should not back away from alternatives, and sincere hypothesis testing. I would express this as 'Supporting Food Choice' as part of our mission.	7/29/2018	7/30/2018	NULL

Vision Statement	To offer a wholesome way of life based on results from significant agricultural research that affects field to table for all generations. (b) (6)	7/27/2018	7/30/2018	NULL
Multiple "senior" authors should be allowed on manuscripts	<p>The journals we publish in allow for multiple corresponding (senior) authors, but within the ARS system we can only designate 1 senior author per manuscript (in ARIS). I think that this policy is outdated in this era of interdisciplinary collaborations. (b) (6)</p> <p>We should both be designated as "senior" authors for this manuscript in ARIS, but instead only one of us can claim the "senior" status. It'd be great to have multiple "senior" authors allowed.</p>	7/27/2018	8/9/2018	7/30/2018 - Thanks for writing in about multiple senior authors on 115s. When we set up the ARIS system to incorporate the "senior author" designation, it was vetted and determined that one senior author was the way to go. With that said, it is always good hear from our scientists and revisit our policies. Therefore, we are checking into any ramifications within ARIS for allowing multiple senior authors. If we do not encounter any issues, we will look to modify our programming. Please stay tuned for an update on this change and thanks again for the information and idea.
Axon Compatibility of Agreements Forms	<p>Some of our scientists are having trouble on Axon getting the Forms & Templates from the Grants & Agreements site and/or being denied access to Axon altogether. Some get an error message about Adobe DC, but they already have that on their computers. Some use MAC computers. I had trouble opening Axon's Excel forms even though I have a new PC with all the newest software. Is there a page, website, email, or memo that specifically addresses these issues that we can give to our IT people so they can help us? Also, our IT is run by an APHIS agency, so they might need information about configuring the local server so ARS employees can use Axon better. The agreements forms are on this Axon site: FMAD/Pages/Forms-Templates-Support-Documents.aspx</p>	7/26/2018	7/26/2018	NULL

Building Maintenance - Assigned building(s) to personnel	Building temperature, humidity, electrical and plumbing are real problems we have here and it is nothing new. Some may not remember when we had maintenance workers assigned to be responsible for individual buildings. That system seemed to work much better than the current ticket system. In my current lab space we have repeating problems with HVAC and plumbing. I think with a dedicated person for a building(or group of buildings) it would be more likely to be repaired once and not show up again on another ticket. It would also focus maintenance workers on a few problems rather than running all over (b) (6).	7/25/2018	7/27/2018	NULL
Car Searches	Y2C: Would you find out and reply on this please? Are contracted security companies at USDA properties (locations) allowed to do random searches of employees' vehicles that are on the property without the employee's consent and without a legal cause?	7/25/2018	7/27/2018	NULL
reverse the budgeting process	I suggest that we reverse the budgeting process. Currently the Administration takes the funds that it wants and what is left is given to scientists. I suggest that the science be funded first, then we determine how much is available for administration. We are here to do agricultural research, but this seems to be forgotten. I do not have enough funds to repair my field equipment, but there seem to be plenty of funds to hire people to run internship programs, make posters for every months "celebration", pay for 'tenant satisfaction surveys', etc. I see these as non-essential to our core mission, but they have funding priority over research.	7/24/2018	7/24/2018	NULL
Foreign cooperators	If I want to give funds to a foreign cooperator does ARS require the foreign cooperator to be registered in the SAM system? Can I give the funds by having a check issued to the foreign cooperator?	7/24/2018	7/24/2018	NULL

Promote sustainable, affordable agricultural products	<p>ARS' mission is to promote sustainable, affordable high quality agricultural products for food and non-food use; to conduct in depth research that addresses national interests and priorities. ARS has the resources to conduct long term, high risk, high return research on agricultural production, natural resource availability, postharvest storage and processing and food quality, safety and nutrition. This will support US growers, food industries and provide consumers with healthy affordable foods and food products. It will also ensure successful competition in global markets, enhancing international trade and profits for the US agricultural industry as a whole.</p>	7/23/2018	7/30/2018	NULL
Proposed Mission, Vision, and Core Values	<p>Mission: ARS improves American agriculture by discovering and disseminating insights, technologies, and practices that enhance our natural resource base, improve the nutritional quality and safety of our food, and expand economic opportunity. Vision: Economically prosperous and environmentally-sustainable agricultural communities, meeting growing global demand for nutritious food and sustainably-sourced fiber and energy. Core values: ARS's succeeds through its commitment to scientific excellence, public accountability and responsiveness, transparency, professional ethics, environmental stewardship, inclusion and equal opportunity.</p>	7/23/2018	7/30/2018	NULL

Sustainability as the Central Target of ARS Mission	<p>Although the present food supply in the US is healthy and sufficient, this situation will change as human population grows and agricultural land becomes degraded by current unsustainable agricultural practices. Food security is the base for all other forms of well-being. As an agency we have the responsibility to be looking to the future when we solve agricultural problems. The future of agriculture is in sustainability. If we place profitability in front of sustainability, we are being short sighted and irresponsible. Food is more important than money and food scarcity will degrade the value of money as food prices sky rocket. ARS scientists can solve the problems of agricultural sustainability if supported by the agency. There is a tremendous source of talent in our agency.</p>	7/23/2018	7/30/2018	NULL
Responsible and safe conduct of Science as a core value	<p>Since 2013 ARS leadership have embarked on path to improve safety culture within ARS. In order to ensure that safety is not seen as a transient priority but a value embedded within all ARS operations I suggest inclusion of safety as part of the responsible conduct of science as an ARS core value. After all Safe and responsible science is good science.</p>	7/23/2018	7/30/2018	NULL
mission	<p>To enhance US food security and increase sustainable agricultural productivity; to protect agricultural enterprises, agroecosystems, and surrounding ecosystems from the impacts of plant pests; to protect US ecosystems from the impacts of necessary agricultural practices; and to facilitate safe agricultural trade development and economic growth.</p>	7/23/2018	7/30/2018	NULL
Simple Mission and Vision Statements	<p>Mission Statement: To conduct scientifically sound research that leads America towards economically and environmentally sustainable agricultural systems. Vision Statement: To solve problems for farmers and the environment.</p>	7/20/2018	7/30/2018	NULL

ARS vision	Vision: The ARS vision is to promote the health and well-being of all people, all creatures, and the earth through conducting research on agriculture, food, and nutrition and disseminating the results of that research.	7/20/2018	7/30/2018	NULL
More Effective Removal and Recycling of Large Excess Items	In our buildings (b) (6)) we have hundreds of pieces of old electrical, electronic, laboratory and power supply equipment. Some date to pre-WWII. Also there are 50 or more large metal shelves, filing cabinets and supply cabinets that are not in use. Nobody has all these paper files anymore with electronic document storage so these large storage items will not be used. While I have cleaned up all that I can, these large bulky items have no place to go, but will also never be used again. We need a mechanism to have roll-off dumpsters placed temporarily so that we can send metal out to scrap in one, computers in another and old electronics in another. While these are not worth much in small amount, by the time you get tons together the money from scrap will at least pay for disposal. Anything else could be given to the lab as an incentive to clean up. We have already cleared a lot of space to work, but we could nearly double that if we could just get rid of the junk!!	7/20/2018	7/30/2018	NULL
Is our mission science or administration?	The challenge is to focus on the mission. There is nothing wrong with the current statement. It feels like our mission has become to increase the administrative functions and push as many admin functions to the scientist and technicians, so we do less and less science. How much do we spend on marketing our "brand" vs doing science?	7/20/2018	7/30/2018	NULL
ARS principal investigator training quick reference guide	Similar to the ethics quick reference guide that was issued to me a few years ago, it would be very helpful if the contents of the recent principal investigator training module in AgLearn were summarized into a quick reference guide.	7/20/2018	7/24/2018	NULL

Meeting attendance approval: Doodle Poll	<p>(b) (6) [REDACTED], I have become very aware of the frustrations in the process for meeting attendance. For example, the International Congress of Plant Pathology (ICPP) starts July 29. A few days ago, we finally got the attendees approval list. Out of approx. 122 people who signed up and wanted to go, only 79 were approved. This means that approx. 1/3 will not be able to attend this rare international meeting (the meeting occurs every 5 years and was last in the US over 25 years ago) to present their cutting edge research to a worldwide audience. What is even more disappointing is that some of those left out are post-docs or early-career scientists. (cont.)</p>	7/19/2018	7/24/2018	NULL
	<p>Rare opportunities like this are critical for their development, exposure, and potential collaborations. I understand the rationale for limiting attendance to a specific meeting so that the public does not perceive we are wasting federal dollars by sending many scientists to the same meeting. I mean, one person is enough to disperse the knowledge and contacts they made to others in their group. Right? Oh wait, it is impossible for one person to attend all concurrent sessions or to be interested or have the knowledge in all fields of Plant pathology that are covered in a meeting like this. (cont.)</p>			

	<p>So, rather than just complain, I would like to offer possible solutions to make this process better. First, tweet the timing of the Doodle Poll. To me, it makes no sense to keep the Doodle Poll open past the registration time. For ICPP, approx. 40 people lost their registration fee of \$800. Isn't this a waste of taxpayer's dollars? Next, approve the meeting attendance at least 2 months in advance so those attending can make the best travel arrangements possible in a timely manner. Second, have a separate category or list for those traveling on contributed or sponsored travel on non-federal funds. This way no extra tax dollars are being spent to attend this meeting (salaries should not count since they are being paid regardless of meeting attendance or not, and it is in their Performance Plans to attend meetings so it is part of their job). I am sure that my ICPP is not the only case nor am I the only one who feels this frustration. I would be more than happy to spend the time discussing my ideas in more detail so that we can find an agreeable solution to this situation. Sincerely, (b) (6)</p>			
reverse the budgeting process	<p>I suggest that we reverse the budgeting process. Currently the Administration takes the funds that it wants and what is left is given to scientists. I suggest that the science be funded first, then we determine how much is available for administration. We are here to do agricultural research, but this seems to be forgotten. I do not have enough funds to repair my field equipment, but there seem to be plenty of funds to hire people to run internship programs, make posters for every month's "celebration", pay for 'tenant satisfaction surveys', etc. I see these as non-essential to our core mission, but they have funding priority over research.</p>	7/19/2018	7/24/2018	NULL

Phased Retirement Program and (b) (6)	<p>ARS has a Phased Retirement Program. (b) (6) and want to retire now. I want to participate in this program and mentor my replacement. This location is Not targeted for closure. It doesn't appear to me that ARS is going to fill any (b) (6) very soon. We already have 1 existing vacant (b) (6) and nothing has happened to fill it, so I can't mentor that one either. Y2C: You and ARS haven't given any indication as to WHEN any of the many (b) (6) will be recruited. When will that start to happen? How can I take advantage of this opportunity and also benefit ARS if ARS isn't hiring any (b) (6) in the near future?</p>	7/18/2018	7/18/2018	NULL
Find a way to continue grant-support activities	<p>(This post has been edited to meet Y2C governance rules. View them "https://y2c.arsnet.usda.gov/InfoLinks.aspx">here .) For several years I have received very useful notifications of grant opportunities curated by a retiring employee. These often included expert advice on issues such as the eligibility of ARS scientists for various grant programs. Recently, we were informed that these would cease when the employee retired. I don't know whether this also applies to some other activities, such as teaching the Grantsmanship Fundamentals class. I found that these types of things were really helpful for pursuing external funding, and I hope that ARS can find a way to continue them. Ideally, someone would catch this employee before retirement and learn as much as possible on how to put together the grant notifications, and other such things.</p>	7/17/2018	8/13/2018	<p>8/2/2018 - The Grantsmanship Officer has taken a number of steps to help ARS scientists help themselves regarding grantsmanship, all through the "https://e.arsnet.usda.gov/sites/ONP/pg/_layouts/15/start.aspx#/">Partnerships and Grants SharePoint site. These include: A "https://e.arsnet.usda.gov/sites/ONP/pg/_layouts/15/start.aspx#/Funding%20Opportunity%20Annoucements/Funding%20Announcements%20Cessation.aspx" listing of various funding organizations and how to receive notices from them,</p>

				<p>A new</p> <p>"https://e.arsnet.usda.gov/sites/ONP/pg/Lists/Links"</p> <p>>Hot Topic on how to</p> <p>"https://e.arsnet.usda.gov/sites/ONP/pg/Lists/Info%20Pieces/DispForm.aspx?ID=61&Source=https%3A%2F%2F%2Earsnet%2Eusda%2Egov%2Fsites%2FONP%2Fpg%2FLists%2FInfo%2520Pieces%2FAllItems%2Easpx&ContentTypeId=0x01040062C8A39E3CCFB046B416B50DBC4AC00">determine ARS eligibility for specific NIFA/AFRI programs, A recording of the</p> <p>"https://e.arsnet.usda.gov/sites/ONP/pg/_layouts/15/start.aspx#/Incoming Research Agreements Budget Training/Home.aspx">Incoming Research Agreements Budget Training and directions on receiving AgLearn credit for taking it, and</p>
				<p>Available soon, recordings of each of the five Grantsmanship Fundamentals classes along with directions for receiving AgLearn credit for them (when available, these will be announced in an upcoming Grantsmanship Times). Answers for many of the questions that the Grantsmanship Officer has routinely been asked are posted under "https://e.arsnet.usda.gov/sites/ONP/pg/Lists/Links" >Hot Topics . Other information on the site includes finding funding; grantsmanship resources; and policies, guidance, and resources – all major sections of the Partnerships and Grants home page.</p>

				<p>In addition, AFM</p> <p>"https://axon.ars.usda.gov/FMAD/Pages/Grants-and-Agreements-Management-Branch_NewSystem.aspx">Grants and Agreements Branch has been posting a lot of up-to-date and very useful information on Axon. To find it, go to "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/Pages/Intranet%20Home.aspx">Axon and either type "grants" into the search box or click on the "Employee Tools" icon and scroll to the bottom of the resulting page. We hope the steps listed above help our scientists with grantsmanship. In the coming months we will continue to answer questions received and research other questions as necessary as we determine how to move forward. More information on how assistance will continue will be provided at a later date.</p>
Vision	Enable those in the Agricultural Enterprise to realize sustainability and profitability in their sector.	7/9/2018	7/30/2018	NULL
Too Many Distractions	Please stop throwing these technological distractions at us. I know they help justify administrative positions within the organizations, but employees are reaching a breaking point. Real work cannot get done because of the constant deluge of distractions such as the SnapComms tickertape.	7/6/2018	7/18/2018	<p>7/18/2018 - The ARS Ticker Tape (also known as the SnapComms App) is a desktop news feed that has been added to all ARS workstation taskbars and it allows the reader to scan ARS-specific headlines while working within other applications. ARS leadership will use this application to notify users about important updates from the Administrator and other noteworthy news. There is no avenue to remove users from receiving these messages. The Ticker Tape has been used twice since April 2018, and as one commenter pointed out, it only takes a few seconds to read and acknowledge the message.</p>

				<p>How to Acknowledge or Snooze the Ticker Tape: - If you click the X or let it run across your screen without clicking the text in the message, you are snoozing the Ticker Tape and it will return in 45 minutes. - To acknowledge the message so it won't return, click on the moving text in the Ticker Tape to see more information. The Ticker Tape will not reappear again if you follow these instructions. For more information, visit the "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/Employee%20Tools/Pages/SnapComms-App.aspx">SnapComms App page on Axon or send an email to "mailto:SnapComms-Admins@ars.usda.gov">SnapComms-Admins@ars.usda.gov .</p>
Mission and Vision Statement Proposals	<p>Mission StatementTo assess the resource and economic-based needs of United States agriculture and fulfill these needs through research, solution implementation, and educational outreach. Vision Statement-- To positively impact the health of United States agriculture and the diversity of communities which sustain the nation's agrarian economy and demand.</p>	7/5/2018	7/5/2018	NULL
ARS Mission Statement	<p>Mission Statement: The mission of the Agricultural Research Service is to serve the People of the United States by conducting the highest caliber scientific research dedicated to providing innovative solutions to key national agricultural challenges.</p>			
Lead the world in agricultural research quality and impact				
Equip agricultural communities with the most relevant cutting edge information;				
Advance agricultural economic competitiveness;				
Deliver unprecedented economic opportunities to rural communities;				
Enhance and sustain our Nation's cornucopia of natural resources				
Respect diversity and integrity throughout all facets of the ARS and the people we serve				
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ARS Mission:	-develop technologies that enhance food chain production while ensuring quality and safe agricultural products -stimulate American nutritional health and wellness to avert disease -safeguard and strengthen the food supply -protect our plan	7/5/2018	7/5/2018	NULL
ARS Core Values	<p>Public Service We are committed to the pursuit of professional excellence motivated by serving the public interest and providing high quality research, products, and timely services. Integrity Ethics, fairness, and honesty define the way we do our work and conduct ourselves. We have the courage to be both innovative and make tough decisions. Respect We value individual diversity and the unique strengths, skills, expertise, and background of our employees. We treat others in a polite and courteous manner. Family We support, care about, listen to, and respond to employees and their family needs. Collaboration We maximize our collective talents through teamwork and partnerships based on mutual trust, respect, support, cooperation, and communication. Personal Development Through a wide variety of learning opportunities, we nurture the development and use of leadership, research, technical, professional, and support skills in all of our employees.</p>	7/5/2018	7/5/2018	NULL

<p>Oracle Database Upgrade - All ARIS systems scheduled to be down two full business days during the busiest time of FY</p>	<p>Having ARIS shut down/not available for use for two full business days during the busiest time of the fiscal year (FY) has a great impact on locations across the country rushing to enter FY18 extramural agreements into the ARIS, and impacts Grants Management Specialists rushing to complete agreement requests already at their level. The scheduled maintenance for Thursday June 21, 2019 through Monday June 25, 2018 comes at a very bad time of the year, particularly because the Agency was not allowed to process ARS-funded extramural agreements until April 27, 2018. This is not the first time an ARIS shut down has occurred around this point in the fiscal year. It would be very helpful if future ARIS (Oracle) updates occurred mid-way through the fiscal year, or during the Continuing Resolution period of time, when so many employees would be less impacted.</p>	<p>6/21/2018</p>	<p>7/10/2018</p>	<p>7/10/2018 - Thanks for writing to Y2C - we want to assure you that we understand your frustration. We continually balance the need for system up time with security and software requirements and do keep both in mind when completing tasks such as this. All ARIS systems (ARIS, ARMPs, ATS, CATS, EATS, NATS, FDMIS, HRD, SAMS, SOD, and GoARIS) use Oracle software that must be upgraded and patched regularly to maintain license support and for security purposes. Most patching is completed during maintenance weekends. At times when we must take the system down, we try to do so during less busy times of the year. However, sometimes a security update or software update is required that can't be delayed. We decided that taking the system down in June was a better option than the July through August timeframe because we know that the end of the fiscal year is critical for system uptime. We were able to plan this one, but we'd like to stress here that these upgrades and security patches are very important, and often can't be delayed without serious risk to the system and our data, the result of which could be much more disruptive than the system maintenance.</p>
				<p>We'd also like to provide a little more background on the issue that happened after the ARIS Systems migration this month, for those that are interested in hearing more. After the migration was complete, the staff tested each application extensively and were able to release the new version to over 5000 users earlier than expected. During the first hour, over 300 users logged in to the system and were working successfully. At that point, two locations notified us of an issue. Because there were so many active users in the system, it was hard to troubleshoot without disconnecting them. We kept troubleshooting without disconnecting the users that had access and discovered a permission error that affected one group of users.</p>

				<p>The fix did not require taking the system down and we were able to resolve it by running some processes. While we strive to notify users of ongoing issues through</p> <p>"https://axon.ars.usda.gov/OCIO/Pages/OCIO-Communication.aspx" target="_blank">OCIO Communication Bluey notifications , we didn't have a list of the actual users that were affected because so many others did have access. We replied to the users that sent Helpdesk tickets letting them know that the issue was resolved. If you have a problem in the future with an ARIS application in regard to connectivity, please send an email to</p> <p>"mailto:ARIS@ars.usda.gov">ARIS@ars.usda.gov so we can let you know when the issue has been resolved.</p>
				<p>Upgrading to new servers and database versions involves many moving pieces and there's always a chance that systems will need tweaking. We can assure you that the staff is dedicated to resolving issues as soon as they arise. They strive to minimize any disruptions and continue to monitor the systems throughout the process. Our goal is always to make sure that everyone has access to all applications and can continue using the systems. We are sorry for the inconvenience and will continue to minimize the down time for ARIS Systems and all other agency applications.</p>

REE Weekly Report	It looks like presentations to professional meetings are material for the REE Weekly report. This information is included in the 115 form scientists submit for entry into ARIS when submitting the abstracts. It's all there. Why not developing software to get this information directly from the ARIS database?	6/11/2018	7/9/2018	7/9/18 Thanks for your suggestion about the REE Weekly Report. ARS uses several channels to collect information for the REE Weekly Report and is always open to use additional channels if feasible. The usefulness of the information in the ARS-115s, especially press releases and other time-sensitive information, depends on timeliness of submittals and in many cases the 115s are received and approved after the information is needed for the Weekly Report. Additionally, while there is a great deal of information in the ARS-115s, most of the information is much more than what is required for the Weekly Report.
				In the last 6 months ARS scientists have submitted approximately eighteen hundred 115s for approval; that's roughly three hundred 115s a month. Staffing to filter, collect, and synthesize the volume of data that comes through the 115 system would be an issue, especially for synthesizing the information in each submission down to 1-2 lines. With that said, we appreciate your suggestion and will continue to look for other options and methods to streamline and make use processes already in place.
ARS OCIO Bluey Communications	Would issuers of Bluey communications please change the note at the bottom of the Bluey template to the plural, rather than possessive, form of the word "Bluey"? i.e. "all Blueys are posted to:..." rather than "all Bluey's are posted to..."	6/7/2018	7/10/2018	7/10/2018 - Thank you, we'll add your suggestion to the next round of updates for the Bluey templates. Templates are stored locally in each OCIO employee's Outlook, so it takes a bit of coordinating to get them all updated and resaved. But we have discussed this and added it to the next round of changes that we will be making.

<p>If you want us to use GSA Advantage, improve website and service</p>	<p>The new form requirement for non-required source vendors is an attempt to strong-arm us into using required sources. However, the GSA website is cumbersome and difficult to find product information on. Often there is not even a picture associated with a product. In addition, the service is terrible. I placed an order that states 5-7 days delivered and after 3 weeks the order has not arrived, there has been no shipping update or tracking number. I called GSA Advantage 2 days ago, was told the order would ship that day, and that I would receive updated shipping and tracking info. I got none of it. So after 3 weeks I have no order and cancelled it and went directly to the vendor, which I should have done from the get-go.</p>	<p>6/4/2018</p>	<p>7/11/2018</p>	<p>7/11/2018 Thank you for your post on the new non-required source form and the GSA Advantage system. "Strongarm" is a strong word (haha)...but they call them mandatory sources of supply for a reason (see https://www.dm.usda.gov/procurement/ccsc/docs/pcref/Purchase_Card_Program_GuideV5_052018.pdf ">here starting on page 73) and the Department and OIG have implemented the new non-required source form to document the file that we really did try to use one of those mandatory sources. Unfortunately, the GSA Advantage system is not fun, and it is not very user friendly. However, it has those mandatory vendors and we are required to consider it before we move on to other sources. There are thousands of vendors on GSA Advantage, and experiences can vary from company to company. If the vendors can't meet our delivery schedule or provide the item required at a reasonable price, then we document that form and keep moving down that list of mandatory sources. We feel your pain with this system and take every opportunity we can to provide feedback to GSA on improvements.</p>
<p>High Threat Security Training emailing requirements</p>	<p>At this location, we have to have a procurement person pay the training fee. Therefore, the procurement person has to add their purchase information to the vendor form and training form, and also email them to the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) at the State Department. Now it appears the instructions have changed again and only shared on Axon (not sent to all travel arrangers by Travel Specialist). And now I have to make sure the procurement person is doing it the way it's spelled out in Axon today. Any ideas on how to facilitate this? I think processes are getting more complicated every day. No, I don't have a purchase card, nor does anyone in my unit. Having purchase cards is discouraged.</p>	<p>6/1/2018</p>	<p>6/15/2018</p>	<p>6/15/2018 Fortunately, the procurement person is processing the documents in the correct manner: Ensure the proper cardholder and approving official's names and signatures are on the credit card form, and the card information paying for the training is accurate. If you need further clarification regarding this process please contact Michele Williams directly at Michele.Williams@ars.usda.gov. Thank you.</p>

Purchasing	<p>We lucky purchase cardholders have been notified (through an AFM Communication email) that our single purchase limit has been increased to \$4,999.99, and may increase to \$10,000. Does that mean we can purchase as we usually have, just with a higher SPL? Or do things have to go out for bid above a certain amount? If so, do we have to do all that additional work, instead of our Purchasing Agent? Will this mean even more (non-scientific) training for us?</p>	5/24/2018	6/19/2018	<p>6/19/2018 Cardholders (with the exception of Administrative Officers and Warranted Contracting Officers) single purchase limit for supplies is now \$4,999. The single purchase limit for services and construction for all cardholders remains at \$2,500 and \$2,000, respectively. No additional training is required. Procurements under the Micro Purchase Threshold (MPT) do not necessarily require formal acquisition procedures (i.e. soliciting completion). Any shifting of work from a purchasing agent to a cardholder due to the cardholders increased limit for supplies is something that would need to be worked out at the location level. Remember the Purchase Card Program Oversight Branch (PCPOB) is available to answer questions from cardholders at "mailto:PCPOB@ars.usda.gov">PCPOB@ars.usda.gov</p>
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<p>High Threat Security Training requires emailing or fax of PII & other issue</p>	<p>The required High Threat Security Training requires emailing or faxing of forms that include full social security number, birth date home address and phone number, credit card number, credit card security number, and signatures. I am shocked that they did not ask for the number for my bank account while they were at it! Send these people back to PII training! The email address is FSIRegistrarHT401@state.gov; not apparently secure. An email option should never have been included. Perhaps a secure sharepoint. Could you please get this set to right? We're required to take this training if we travel internationally. Further, the information that came out with information on the training says "The High Threat Security Overseas Seminar is mandatory for all U.S. government direct-hire (FS, CS, PSC, WAE) employees on a TDY assignment of less than 45 days in a calendar year at any one or any combination of designated high threat, high risk posts.</p>	<p>5/3/2018</p>	<p>6/1/2018</p>	<p>6/1/2018 The Foreign Service Institute (FSI) at the State Department has dedicated personnel processing application requests for USDA/ARS. The FSI Registrar's office understands USDA/ARS's Personally Identifiable Information (PII) policy, and accepts password protected group and/or individual requests for USDA/ARS through their secured FSI email address FSIRegistrarHT401@state.gov. Requests submitted using the FSI Registrar's email address must be in PDF pdf format, password protected, and entitled "USDA" in the subject line. Applicants are to send a separate email with the password using the FSI Registrar's email address. The FSI Registrar's office has ensured that once the documents are received, a confirmation email will be sent to the recipient. Instructions to apply for the HTSOS training and a printed list of all countries affected by the HTSOS training requirement is located on Axon "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/FMAD/Travel/Pages/Home.aspx"> here . The FSI-State Department indicates that the HTSOS training is mandatory for certain personnel.</p>
	<p>Please consult the Bureau of Diplomatic Security or the Executive Directorate of the Regional Bureau for the latest designated countries. " "For travel in the 2018 calendar year, only personnel traveling to high-threat, high-risk countries and regions (as defined by the State Department) require additional training, including:" The State Department doesn't list Canada on their website as of 5/3/18, but the required country list for ARS does. Would be good if sets of instructions agreed with each other.</p>			<p>While the FSI-State Department services various personnel and language in the HTSOS instructions reflect this audience, the HTSOS training is mandatory for ALL traveling to high threat, high risk posts. Please note that FSI-State Department is in the process of removing country lists pertaining to the HTSOS training from their website due to the requirement of ALL countries complying by January 1, 2019. For further assistance, please contact: Michele Williams Travel Specialist National Capital Region Business Service Center Phone: (301) 504-1309 Email: michele.williams@ars.usda.gov Sherona Hopkins Travel Team Lead National Capital Region Business Service Center Phone: (301) 504-1124 Email: sherona.hopkins@ars.usda.gov</p>

Is this Y2C website now truly anonymous?	<p>When the Y2C site was initially created, it was meant to be a location where employees could share ideas or voice concerns in a completely anonymous fashion. Coming to the website today, I was required to log in twice with my USDA credentials, which uniquely identify me to the website administrators. How are any comments posted here guaranteed to be truly anonymous, or is that the whole purpose of putting the website into a space where users are able to be easily identified, in order to dampen criticisms? Is there any way to make the website go back to being truly anonymous the way it used to be?</p>	5/2/2018	5/23/2018	<p>5/23/2018 - Thanks for writing in, we aim to be as transparent as possible so want to give you background information on the evolution of Y2C's anonymity changes. The original Y2C did not require a login, and was considered an anonymous idea management system. That worked well for us for a while, but in 2016, OIG ordered ARS to take down that publicly accessible, anonymous website. The old Y2C went dark, and a team worked to create a new site that met all requirements but still provided a platform for employees to share their ideas throughout all levels of the Agency. While users must login, we won't access, provide, or use that information unless we are faced with a situation related to employee safety, wellbeing, or an emergency situation. The Y2C Program Team respects your confidentiality. Information related to anonymity on Y2C is posted to the "https://y2c.arsnet.usda.gov/InfoLinks.aspx" About Y2C page , as mentioned in the comment below.</p>
Hiring strategy, filling vacancies	<p>The Administrator's email said: filling the roles that support our highest research priorities and critical infrastructure functions...filling some 50% of the permanent vacancies... >Questions: Which job series will be hired? Which grades? I think it's only fair for ARS staff be told if they are hiring only Cat. 1 scientists and only GS-12 and higher. Will any support staff be hired? Will you tell us?</p>	5/1/2018	6/22/2018	<p>6/22/2018 Thank you for your post...and thanks to all who posted comments related to it. Hundreds of positions from across all disciplines and grade ranges— i.e., scientific, administrative, professional, technical, to include entry level up to senior level positions will be recruited under the ARS Hiring strategy over the next few months. While our category 1 scientists are important, we understand that filling our non-scientific positions with employees with diverse disciplines, experiences, and job knowledge to support the ARS programs and mission is just as important – this is evident in the landscape of position types and grade ranges the agency will be recruiting for during this ARS-wide hiring initiative. It is obvious from some of the comments that people are watching the positions get posted in USA Jobs.</p>

				<p>It is exciting to see movement after the long, hard freeze! Please be careful, though, not to make any assumptions related to which positions got posted first, or what grades they are. Maybe these were already in the works and were just easiest to address first? Announcements from GS-2 to GS-15 are planned and in the works. And, at least one poster will be happy to hear that more than 50 PSA/Secretary positions will be recruited....definitely critical and high priority! For additional or specific information for vacancies in your Area, please contact your Area Director's Office.</p>
Spare Lincpass Credentials	<p>Our Lincpass credentials are valuable. I keep mine locked in my office, taking it out only to gain access to email, etc. The new govt laptop I have coming will require me to use my credentials. When I travel with the computer, that means I will have to take the credentials with me. If I lose them, how long will it take before I can get a replacement? Would it be possible to have credentials for travel and for in office work?</p>	4/30/2018	5/31/2018	<p>5/31/2018 Per the United States Department of Homeland Security HSPD-12 (LincPass) regulations, a federal employee can only have one LincPass credential. As soon as an employee reports their Lincpass lost or stolen to their supervisor and their HSPD-12 Security Officer, the lost card can be terminated and a new card printed immediately. The new card should arrive at the shipping address on file in about 3 business days. It is always shipped to the credentialing site on file. The employee is notified and must make an appointment with the servicing center to activate the LincPass. Please note that with the current renewal surge taking place, some locations' appointments are out one month or more. A list of the location security officers can be found on the "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/Employee%20Tools/Pages/LincPass.aspx" > Axon LincPass page .</p>
Axon page with Links to SOPs?	<p>What is the link in Axon for this web page you mentioned? "A page is available on Axon that will host future SOPs developed by the upcoming Task Order team. For now, it include links to other pages on Axon that have current SOPs and How To documents". You said it's available now. Would you please post the actual link to that particular web page, please?</p>	4/25/2018	4/30/2018	<p>4/30/2018 - Thanks for your question. The SOPs and Guides page is located here: "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/Employee%20Tools/Pages/SOPs.aspx" > https://axon.ars.usda.gov/Employee%20Tools/Pages/S... You can also search "sop" in the search bar from any page and it is the top result.</p>

Network maintenance monthly	<p>Suggestion: Change the ARS/OCIO routine monthly network maintenance on ARSnet systems to be done mostly on Sundays (Saturday night to Sunday night), instead of mostly all day on Saturday (from Friday night to Saturday night). The current practice makes ARMPs unavailable on Saturday when a person would most likely come in on the weekend to work. This is a critical time for field locations to be preparing the FY19 ARMPs and we often need to work on ARMPs on Saturdays. Thank you.</p>	4/18/2018	7/10/2018	<p>7/10/2018 - For many years, OCIO staff have followed a regular schedule of the third weekend of every month, except for the month of September. We avoid conducting any routine maintenance operations between September 1st and September 30th, to avoid disrupting the hectic year-end period. During the month of September we only conduct emergency maintenance that cannot be delayed until October. The standard maintenance period begins at 9pm ET on Friday and continues until 6pm ET on Saturday. While this schedule may seem arbitrary, it comes from very careful consideration and specific dependencies. Why is it the third weekend of the month? - To allow our customers and our System Administration Team to plan their work, we selected the third weekend of the month for our scheduled maintenance.</p>
				<p>We selected the third weekend of the month because our maintenance has to occur AFTER the second Tuesday of each month. The second Tuesday of the month is known as "Patch Tuesday" and is when Microsoft releases all of the critical and important security updates for that month. We use the intervening time between Patch Tuesday and our maintenance weekend to perform testing of the patches to help us avoid problems a particular patch may create.</p>

				<p>Why is the maintenance period from Friday 9pm ET until Saturday 6pm ET instead of Saturday 9pm ET until Sunday 6pm ET? Despite our best efforts at planning and testing, sometimes the changes which happen during maintenance have unexpected and disruptive effects. To reduce the possibility of this causing business disruptions during the normal work week, we begin our maintenance as early in the weekend as possible; beginning our work after the close of the business day on the West Coast. If problems arise from maintenance, the 36-hour period between Saturday evening and Monday morning are the safety buffer that allows us ample time to identify and repair any problems. Delaying our maintenance window by 24 hours to begin on Saturday evening would reduce this window to just 12 hours, which we see as an insufficient safety margin. We hope that you can understand the reasons for our maintenance and why it occurs on the schedule it does. We do our best to balance your business needs with the needs to keep our systems secure and available during prime business hours. We realize that from time to time this does mean that systems may not be available when you would like to have them.</p>
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				<p>As a potential help to our customers, we'll revise our regular maintenance "Bluey" advisories to project when the next two scheduled monthly maintenance weekends will be conducted. Hopefully, this will help our customers project ahead and plan work so that the maintenance periods will be less of a disruption. You'll see this added to our July maintenance advisory which will be sent the week of July 16th. Try as we may, there simply is never a "good" time to perform system maintenance where OCIO staff will not cause at least some disruption. As a result, we have to balance the needs of our customers who sometimes need to work throughout the weekend with the security requirements which mandate that our system administrators conduct this regular maintenance. We also have to consider the work environment of the staff who conduct this maintenance each month.</p>
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Align ARS mandated training and Agency practice	<p>A recent Your Two Cents post suggested that the ARS “implement an anonymous complaint channel to combat organizational bias.” This suggestion was based on ARS-required training for supervisors. Unfortunately, the response provided did not address the suggestion, and no indication was given regarding whether the Agency would or would not implement the suggestion of providing employees an anonymous complaint channel. In the response, the statement “There are numerous ways an employee can choose to notify Agency leaders - some are anonymous...” is misleading since there are currently no mechanisms that are anonymous to management. Anonymity to management is precisely what the ARS-required training specified in order to combat organizational bias. The listing of numerous non-anonymous methods for reporting does not provide the redress recommended in the recent training mandated for all ARS supervisors. The Agency response, when juxtaposed with recent Agency-required training, points to underlying inefficiencies within our Agency where improvements can and should be made.</p>	4/17/2018	4/30/2018	NULL
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	<p>Namely, that portions of the supervisor training (mandated for all ARS supervisors) provided training counter to what the Agency is doing in practice. Here are several suggestions to improve the efficiency of the Agency. 1) Evaluate the applicability of training before it is assigned to every supervisor (or employee) in the Agency. Enormous cumulative amounts of employee time was spent completing training that simply is not valid by Agency practice. 2) After reviewing the training, remove parts that contain material that does not apply or will not be used. 3) If material cannot be removed, then clearly indicate the portions that do not apply and provide the ability to skip those portions and eliminate any test questions that refer to the inapplicable portions. 4) Choose training that aligns with Agency intended practice. 5) Implement the remedies specified by the training, if indeed that training is valuable enough to be required of all supervisors.</p>			
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Tailoring Aglearn trainings to needs and efficiency	<p>Can someone with authority please have a discussion with those who assign/design AgLearn trainings? I fully accept that trainings are required. However, taking required trainings that are not relevant or are poorly set up saps joy from my work life and extends my work day – the time drain seems pointless and prevents me from attending to the rest of the work I have to do. The misuse of our time is a hideous waste of taxpayer dollars. Two recent examples: I spent 2.5 hours on the required FALT II training that had nothing to do with anything that I deal with – the fund dealings they described are above my pay grade or not my job. I am a credit card approver. My technician who uses the credit card was also required to take the training. Neither of us are in any position to reprogram funds, change funds between appropriations, or contact Congress with requests to do so. Why on earth were we assigned to do it?</p>	4/10/2018	6/1/2018	<p>6/1/2018 Thank you for your post and your two examples. We certainly understand your frustrations, and often feel them as well. Unfortunately, some of the training we are required to take is mandated outside of our control. The FALT II training was assigned to us by the Department's Office of the Chief Financial Officer. Although it has some good information, most of it really is not relative to our day-to-day functions. We've relayed this to the OCFO, and will do so again. The Principal Investigator training is a different example. This training is definitely valuable to all PI's. ARS developed this training in-house, working with a respected professional training organization to develop it. It sounds like you learn very well by reading through the subject matter. Others, however, require that auditory component to really assimilate the subject matter. We have passed your comments along to the office that coordinated this training development so that in the future, they can try and develop the training so that it is a bit more flexible in how it is presented to the recipients. Thanks again for the feedback.</p>
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	<p>The Principal Investigator training is listed as taking 4 hours. The rate at which one can go through the slides is tied to the audio. You can't speed it up. Even if you can read quickly, you can't move on. It has captions of the audio, so one should be able to access the full content more rapidly. If you go back a slide to review something, you still have to wait as the audio plays out. Again. I have looked at the first two slides, then abandoned it. Not due until the end of the month. I contacted Aglearn; it can't be sped up. I can usually halve the time a training takes and learn from them best by reading the information rather than relying on audio. Some required trainings are quite good. You can go through at your own pace, and they are relevant to what we do (e.g., computer security). The ones with pretests are wonderful. If the Agency wants to improve morale, please, when it is possible, improve the quality of what we are required to do. Please help if you can.</p>			
SnapComms ARS Ticker Tape app	<p>This open and running app showed up on this computer at the bottom of the screen. How do I turn it off, remove it, stop it, or get rid of it? I don't want this. Who put this on the computer (without even asking)?</p>	4/5/2018	4/5/2018	<p>4/5/2018 - The SnapComms App (also known as the ARS Ticker Tape) is a desktop news feed that has been added to ARS workstation taskbars. A Ticker is a narrow window of moving text displayed at the bottom of an employee's screen. A Ticker allows the reader to scan ARS-specific headlines while working within other applications. Its short, snappy format is ideal for conveying bite size chunks of information, and for signposting and hyperlinking to more detailed content within its headline. ARS will use this application to notify users about important updates from the Administrator, Axon updates, and other important notifications. For example, next week there will be an announcement inviting all ARS employees to provide feedback on a new ARS Vision and Mission from Dr. Jacobs-Young that you won't want to miss.</p>

				<p>Note for Acknowledging a Message (so it won't return): To acknowledge the SnapComms message, click on the moving text in the ticker tape to see more information. If you click the X on the ticker tape, it will reappear as a reminder later until you acknowledge the message by clicking the content. For more information, visit the SnapComms App on Axon:</p> <p>"https://axon.ars.usda.gov/Employee%20Tools/Pages/SnapComms-App.aspx">https://axon.ars.usda.gov/Employee%20Tools/Pages/SnapComms-App.aspx</p>
Best Practices for Website Maintenance	<p>Colleagues, With ARS allowing individual management units some control over their websites, I am looking for "best practices" ideas to help folks who may not have web content design experience. Our web pages are sometimes the first and last thing the public sees when looking for information regarding the impacts of research conducted by ARS. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.</p>	4/5/2018	4/13/2018	<p>4/13/2018 - We spoke with the ARS Web Team, and they have a document that might be just what you are looking for! It's called "Understanding Landing Page Content," and it goes over the 5 areas of editable content on ARS webpages and links to directions for those sections. Location Webmasters should have access to the SharePoint site that hosts this document. If you have any issues accessing the page and are a webmaster, please contact your local IT Specialist or Helpdesk@ars.usda.gov.</p> <p>"https://e.arsnet.usda.gov/sites/OCIO/EASB/WT/webbies/Shared%20Documents/Understanding%20Landing%20Page%20Content.docx?Web=1">https://e.arsnet.usda.gov/sites/OCIO/EASB/WT/webbies/Shared%20Documents/Understanding%20Landing%20Page%20Content.docx?Web=1</p> <p>Let us know if this meets your needs. We also encourage any other best practices to be posted here as well. Thanks for using Y2C!</p>

<p>ORISE and "Obligation Rules for Severable Services"</p>	<p>We sometimes bring in post docs through the ORISE program, which requires establishing an IAA and obligation of funds. The AO at my location believes that funds cannot be obligated in one FY for post doc stipend that will be paid in the next FY (so, for a post doc beginning on August 1, only two months of funding could be obligated). This would seem to create a problem - all ORISE post docs would be out of work for a period at the beginning of each FY until new agreements could be established, etc. At the moment I am completing an AgLearn module that seems to say that crossing the FY boundary is fine, as long as the obligation is for no more than 12 months. Specifically, I am looking at Slide 112 of "USDA Federal Appropriations Law Training Part 2". It isn't clear to me whether the ORISE agreements are severable or non-severable, but non-several agreements can cross the FY boundary as well. If this is all correct, I request that this issue be clarified with all parties involved in setting up ORISE agreements, ideally soon, to avoid research disruption, and unnecessary financial hardship on early career researchers.</p>	<p>4/3/2018</p>	<p>7/6/2018</p>	<p>7/6/2018 The pending Policies and Procedures (P&P) document for the ORISE program will certainly help to clear up misunderstandings, but most importantly the Grants Management Specialists (GMSs) are available to help the ARS Principal Investigators (PIs) and the AOs when planning extramural or interagency agreements. You are correct that severable services and nonseverable services agreements may in fact cross the fiscal year line. However, it should be noted that a severable services agreement that crosses the fiscal year line is limited to one year in duration, whereas a nonseverable services agreement may exceed one year in duration. The tasks to be performed must be evaluated to determine if the agreement is severable or nonseverable. It should also be noted that any interagency agreement with ORISE must be fully funded (less than one year, one year, or greater than one year).</p>
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example: ARS PI needs ORISE Participant beginning June 1, 2018 and will require the participant for a year (through May 31, 2019). The ARS PI will be required to obligate funding up front for June through May 31, 2019. • Example: ARS PI needs ORISE Participant beginning June 1, 2018 and will require the participant through August 31, 2019 (nonseverable). The ARS PI will be required to obligate funding up front for June through August 31, 2019. When this type of interagency agreement with the Department of Energy (DOE) is issued under the authority of the Economy Act with time-limited funds (e.g., annual single year funds), DOE must fully obligate those funds to a contract (with ORISE) prior to September 30.

				<p>To the extent that the agreement has not been performed by DOE, or the funds not obligated by DOE with ORISE by the end of the fiscal year, the funds must be deobligated and returned to ARS. In this regard, DOE has assured ARS that they will obligate all interagency agreement funds in their contract with ORISE before the end of the fiscal year. Also, DOE annually notifies ARS of a cut-off date for accepting interagency agreements, and the cut-off date for this fiscal year is Thursday, September 6, 2018, by 5:00 pm (EST). The release of the ORISE P&P will hopefully provide greater clarity for this process. It is expected that the P&P will be issued by the end of August 2018. Additionally, Axon has a separate "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/EmployeeTools/Pages/ORISE.aspx">ORISE page, and the "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/FMAD/Pages/Grants-and-Agreements-Management-Branch.aspx">Grants and Agreements Management Branch , “https://axon.ars.usda.gov/FMAD/Pages/Interagency_Agreements.aspx">Interagency Agreements ” page on Axon provides additional information on the ORISE agreements.</p>
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Hiring & Appointing without Advertisement	<p>Last week a (b) (6) had a permanent reassignment without advertisement/competition to a (b) (6) management position that will not exist in 6 months. How did the Secretary approve this position for hire but hasn't approved the other 700 vacant positions? Additionally, this week a (b) (6) who is already serving in an acting management position was appointed to an even higher acting management position again without advertisement/competition. The appearance generated from management's actions is not positive for ARS employees. The hiring freeze appears to be selective which is contributing to uncertainty for ARS employees and goes against the push toward transparency during the agency reorganization.</p>	3/20/2018	3/26/2018	<p>3/26/2018 Thank you for your posting. This is a great opportunity for some myth busting! Although we have been under a hiring freeze for the last 14 months, the hiring freeze did not restrict managers' flexibility or discretion in making lateral reassignments or details (without competition) to a position of no higher grade or promotion potential level within the Agency so long as the individual is qualified for the reassigned position. In order to ensure adequate flexibility to address the needs of employees possibly impacted by the proposed budgets for FYs 18 and 19, the Agency has used the authority to lateral employees very judiciously. When the Agency has chosen to use the flexibility, it has been after determining that there are no impacted employees who could possibly meet the requirements of the position. In none of the cases where this authority was used, did an actual increase in FTE occur for the Agency; a vacancy remained behind the person transferred which remains frozen.</p>
				<p>Opposed to permanent lateral transfers, the Agency has been making full use of the ability to non-competitively detail or temporarily promote people for terms not to exceed 120 days. Temporary details/promotions of 120 days or less are not subject to competition provided all qualifications requirements are met. A not so fun fact: ARS currently has a 20% vacancy rate. Unfortunately, the hiring freeze is alive and well (although we hope it is coming to an end soon). We apologize if any HR related actions give the appearance of not being transparent. You can be assured that decisions are made with consideration to those HR flexibilities provided and that they align appropriately with the hiring freeze guidelines and within the proposed ACES reorganization plans and requirements. Again, thanks for your posting.</p>

Telework form Help needed Adobe Reader	The new telework form we received doesn't work with Adobe Reader. Lots of people don't have Acrobat. 1) Someone needs to fix this before sending it out to everyone. 2) Would some folks post some solutions, please? The forms are due very soon, so quick tips would really be appreciated. Thank you.	3/20/2018	3/30/2018	3/30/2018 - We spoke to OCIO and they let us know that ARS has purchased Adobe Acrobat DC licenses for everyone in ARS. If you don't already have this installed, you should set a time to meet with your local IT contact soon. If they are unable to help you, a Portal ticket should be created to contact BSC IT Specialists for more support. AOs have access to the Portal if you do not, so work with local IT or your AO to create a ticket in that case. Are you having any issues with other forms on the Axon Electronic Forms site? All forms placed there go through a rigorous process to ensure they are accessible, ready for digital signatures, and free of errors. ARS even improved the original form that was sent by the Department for ease of use. A temporary workaround could include printing the forms, signing by hand, and scanning them back in.... although we encourage everyone to get Adobe DC installed on their computers. Good luck and make sure to work through your local IT channels and then the BSC IT staff if needed.
Date on Y2C's Responses	Y2C: Remember to insert a date at the beginning of each of your responses, please. Thank you.	3/14/2018	3/28/2018	3/28/2018 - Thanks for the reminder, we'll try to do better!
Have guidelines, but keep room for some flexibility	I think having some guidelines for readability and minimal contact information would be useful, but we need to have some flexibility for our needs would be useful. It would be useful to add in information about additional assignments or other things such as advance out of office notice or other pertinent information. I don't think we need to create another straight jacket when we have so many existing restrictions.	3/8/2018	3/8/2018	NULL
Conferences, Doodle Polls, New Invite after Due Date	What do we do if an invitation is received to go to an unlisted conference in the 3	3/1/2018	3/28/2018	We are closing this Idea as only part of the text was received. If you are the sender, please submit a new Idea with the full text. Thanks!

Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for each position	<p>Just like most people are on the bandwagon for standardization of signature blocks, I would like to know how many people are on board on creating SOPs for their position. There are many people who will be retiring soon, and a SOP may help the new people taking their position. I understand we have PDs but knowing how the employee before you did their job could help new employees adapt better and faster. Just my two cents!</p>	2/27/2018	3/30/2018	<p>3/30/2018 - We like this idea! While some commenters feel they don't have time to keep these types of SOPs up to date, we think there are certain positions and duties that it could save time in the long run. In some cases, a general guideline of duties alone can be extremely helpful for knowledge transfer or emergency circumstances. A few other resources for you: - Check out the "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/Inside%20ARS/NACOP/Pages/NACOP.aspx">NACOP and "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/Inside%20ARS/AO-Hub/Pages/AO-Hub.aspx">AO Hub pages on Axon. NACOP has a list of resources that are willing to assist others with tasks listed by subject matter, and the AO Hub has a number of SOPs and resources - A previous Y2C Challenge and the ACES strategic framework has gathered ideas for requested SOPs. Soon, a task order tiger team will be formed to tackle this list. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Colette Wood or Perry Rainosek. The "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/websites/ACESProject/default.aspx">ACES site on Axon has more information.</p>
				<p>- A page is available on Axon that will host future SOPs developed by the upcoming Task Order team. For now, it include links to other pages on Axon that have current SOPS and How To documents that you can use, including "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/FMAD/Pages/Grants-and-Agreements-Management-Branch.aspx">Grants and Agreements , "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/IT%20Resources/Pages/Home.aspx">IT Resources , and "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/HRD/REE-Work-Life-Programs/Pages/REE-Telework-Program.aspx">Telework information (just to name a few). Thanks for posting!</p>

Publication rating system for SY performance	There could be a point system implemented to equitably determine the rating (e.g., meets or exceeds) an SY receives for the performance plan element for publications. Please see the attached file for a description of the idea and an example rating system.	2/26/2018	3/13/2018	<p>3/13/2018 - Thanks for a very unique and intriguing idea for determining the performance rating for a scientist in the Reports Research Results element. It's always a challenge determining a proper rating for reporting results which requires two manuscripts of original research be authored by the scientist and submitted to a peer reviewed journal during the rating period. We need to also keep in mind that there are other components to this element including completing and submitting annual reports, entering all manuscripts (not just journals) of original research into the ARIS system in a timely manner and revising & resubmitting any rejected manuscript within one year of the rejection notice.</p>
				<p>The rating official has to take into consideration all of these items to determine if the scientist meets or exceeds the standard. The idea you suggested uses a sliding scale to achieve an exceeds rating that requires more points in total as a scientist moves up in the GS grade level. It also provides more points for senior author vs co-author paper. This isn't an entirely bad idea but many scientists, especially those that collaborate on large projects may not concur with the lower co-author rating as well as the increased point requirement for higher GS grades.</p>

				<p>There may also be questions related to whether or not every paper submitted is worth the same point totals based on some of the other considerations you mentioned. With that said your ideas certainly may merit additional discussion. Our current system works well when both supervisors and scientists engage in an open and honest dialogue on the performance expectations for publications. The supervisor needs to be able to articulate what they are looking for in terms of assigning a rating. There are always questions on what constitutes an 'exceeds' and we understand the concerns about being able to provide measurable guidance for supervisors to use. We'll forward your comments to the Area Directors and request that they review the idea and give some thought to the value and need of changing the way supervisors look at evaluation of this important performance element.</p>
Change in eligibility to ineligible still need an AD-3018 form?	<p>Case 1: Say an employee under the old policy was considered eligible but opted out. And now that employee is considered ineligible anyway because of tightened expectations for eligibility under the "common sense" intent. Does an AD-3018 have to be filled out to indicate the employee's change in eligibility status? If so, how do we fill out the form in that case? If not, how does the new determination of ineligibility get communicated up the line? (or maybe it doesn't need to be communicated except from the supervisor to the employee through a memo?) Case 2: Say an employee is under a previous telework agreement, but is currently working a compressed 4day/10hour schedule. They are now ineligible if they want to keep that schedule. Does an AD-3018 have to be filled out to indicate the employee's change in eligibility status? [and other questions as in Case 1 above]. Thanks for your help.</p>	2/24/2018	2/27/2018	<p>We need to also keep in mind that many scientific disciplines look at the order of authors differently including those that recognize the last author on the publication as the lead or senior author. Case 1: Employees that are not eligible to telework do not need to complete an agreement. However, they must have received an eligibility determination at some point communicating why they are not eligible for telework. For most employees this should have been when they first started or during the most recent annual telework eligibility recertification. If an employee needs a new eligibility notification, there are templates on the https://axon.ars.usda.gov/HRD/REE-Work-Life-Programs/Pages/Telework-Documents-and-Resources.aspx>REE Telework Axon site that can be used by supervisors and/or the Administrative Officer.</p>

				Supervisors must ensure that their "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/HRD/REE-Work-Life-Programs/Pages/REE-Telework-Contacts.aspx" telework coordinator also receives a copy of the notification so that they can update the telework database. Case 2: Employees that are on compressed schedules are not automatically ineligible for telework. Telework eligibility is determined by the duties and responsibilities of the position and not the work schedule. An employee on a 4-10 compressed work schedule may not have room in their schedule for regular/recurring telework but they could have a situational/non-scheduled telework agreement. This would allow them the flexibility to telework during a facility/weather closure or other emergency.
Telework Form Questions	On the AD-3018 form under Employee's Continuity of Operations Plan Status , does "Emergency Essential" refer to employees with ARMP M1 and M2 footnotes? M1 footnote: Exigency employee must report to or remain on work site regardless of extreme weather or other emergency conditions. M2 footnote: Exigency employee must report to or remain on work site for budget shutdowns. Excepted employees include employees who are performing emergency work involving the safety of human life or the protection of property. Who is considered to be "Mission Critical?"	2/22/2018	2/27/2018	We have received lots of feedback about this specific section of the AD-3018 Telework Agreement form and realize that it can be confusing. We have asked the Department for clarification because we are not exactly sure if they intended this section to only cover the positions/employees identified in the USDA Continuity of Operations Plan or if it includes location/office designated emergency employees. If this is the only information you are waiting for to complete your form, you can proceed and simply leave this section blank. If needed, we can make adjustments to agreements once we have guidance from the Department.

<p>Airport Parking Limited Reimbursement FTR § 301-10.308</p>	<p>We received a notice from BTAB/AFM about limiting reimbursement for airport parking. A revised notice said: It is not necessary for employees who live 2 to 3 hours from a major airport to do a cost estimate when the cost for a shuttle, taxi, TNC, and INC may exceed the allowable estimated cost for airport parking." Suggestion : ARS should revise the "2 to 3 hours from a major airport" to "30 miles or more from a major airport". Outside of major cities and in rural areas finding alternative transportation (not using POV) is extremely difficult, especially during the night, if not downright impossible. I wonder how the 2-3 hour cutoff was determined and why it's in time rather than distance.</p>	<p>2/22/2018</p>	<p>4/11/2018</p>	<p>4/11/2018 Thank you for your post! According to GSA, an agency can consider either time or distance or both when the location from where a traveler departs has no major international airport within his or her local travel area. Taking this into consideration, we will issue the revised policy to read as follows: Limited Reimbursement for Airport Parking Employees who reside more than 35 miles or 30 minutes from a major airport are not required to complete a cost estimate when the amount for a shuttle, taxi, Transportation Network Company (TNC), and Innovative Mobility Technology Company (IMTC) will exceed the cost of airport parking. When claiming this type of expense in Concur, provide the following justification: "Use of GOV or POV is necessary when the cost of a shuttle, taxi, TNC, and IMTC from the traveler's location will exceed the cost of airport parking." Although the cost of a shuttle, taxi, Uber, or Lyft will exceed the cost of parking, approving officials must still authorize the most expeditious mode or route that is advantageous to the government (5 U.S.C. 5733).</p>
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When does "Situational Telework" become frequent or recurring?	A recurring theme with the New USDA Telework Policy Webinar was that situational telework should not be frequent, recurring, or follow a pattern. Employees on the previous situational telework program would often work from home up to 3-4 days per month to catch up on paperwork. Assuming that these situations do not involve weather, personal appointments, or reasonable accommodations, is this too much? Is teleworking only on Fridays considered following a pattern for situational telework? More specific guidance on these recommendations would be appreciated.	2/22/2018	2/27/2018	This is one of those questions that does not have a cut and dry answer. It's really up to the supervisor to determine what is appropriate and when a pattern begins to emerge. Supervisors must consider the intent of the new telework policy when making decisions on the frequency of situational telework. The intent is to increase the presence of USDA employees in USDA offices, encourage greater collaboration, provide the best customer service to both internal and external customers, and make us more accountable. We do believe that teleworking every Friday is following a pattern and that should actually be considered a regular/recurring telework agreement schedule. Teleworking once a week (if on a 5 day work week schedule) does meet the policy requirement and supervisors can consider approving this type of telework schedule.
(b) (6) Travel Tea Time	How can we find out the topics to be discussed during the (b) (6) Travel Tea Time for each time before actually logging into the web meeting?	2/20/2018	3/14/2018	3-2-2018 - Thanks for your question. The topics for the next month's tea time agenda are discussed at the end of the previous month's call. An email will be sent out soon listing the topics through the remainder of the calendar year.
Supportive of Unifying but Need Internal & External Signature Block	Although I believe a template was made available from (b) (6) 2/12/2013, it seems most of the Agency didn't follow it or ARS didn't enforce it. This was the timeframe that the ARS logo was banned from communications. Since this topic is being re-opened, I'm on the side of pertinent contact information only. I'd prefer to see: name, title, agency, office (e.g. Area Directors Office, Research Unit, AFM, OCIO, etc.), address & phone. I wish to keep the address in there as I need to know time zones of individuals. If my customer base doesn't know my time zone, they don't know when to reach me & may call outside of my working hours because it's a 2 or 3 hour time difference. Additionally, I need to know if my customer is from Logan, UT or Geneva, NY.	2/16/2018	2/16/2018	NULL

	<p>If the address is removed, AFM/AD/OCIO may not know who they are just based on a person's name. I also believe there should be two signature blocks, one for internal USDA and one for external. The 2013 email template required ARS to use envelope icons for links to webpages. This is unnecessary for USDA staff as we already know who we are, who we serve, what we do, and where to find the information. I can see these links being beneficial for all external USDA customers that are receiving communications. Additionally, acronyms shouldn't be used on external customers but could be used on internal communications.</p>			
	<p>The telework day on the some signatures need to go as it's supposed to be transparent. I don't understand why email would be listed as the recipient will have the email by receiving your email. I find the images, personal mottos, quotes, and background colors distracting and unprofessional as these wouldn't be put on paper communication (which a number of these emails become formal records and are sometimes printed for files). An example of an internal vs. external signature block template is attached.</p>			
Official federal government communication	<p>Why should email be treated differently than any other government official communication? If you had to send the message on letterhead, you would not be allowed to add personal mottos, colors, pictures, fonts, quotes, designs, icons, website links, etc. Uses a lot of memory. They mess with reading the emails on Outlook Web Email and devices such as I-phones. There's been a lot of discussions lately in the federal government about emails as records. I know often email is used like a written telephone call, just for quick business; that's when you could insert your personality (not in formal communications).</p>	2/16/2018	2/16/2018	NULL

Yes Please!	I feel that a standard email signature for ARS employees is a great idea!! Having policy to follow in which both employees and supervisors can use would be great. Personally I have seen multiple email signatures that need to be addressed as they are inappropriate but have not been able to address as there is no policy.	2/14/2018	2/14/2018	NULL
Keep the quote in the signature block!	I like the second template but with the freedom to add a small quote or motto. <Science Lover>, <The Boss> USDA, ARS, <SEA>, <Awesome Location> <1234 Main St> (P)(b) (6), Science.Lover@ars.usda.gov	2/14/2018	2/14/2018	NULL
ARS Email Signatures	I agree that some type of standardization should be created. There are too many that are using colors and backgrounds that increase the file sizes and cause a distraction from the communication. I think we can keep our "personality" in our signature by allowing different fonts for the name, but the location and contact information should be a legible font size and style.	2/12/2018	2/12/2018	NULL
Standardized signatures	We need to remain consistent as an agency. An update of the ARS Correspondence Manual 261.2M (1991) needs to be drastically updated to address this and other relevant current topics related to new means of correspondence. The agency as a whole should be corresponding consistently and appropriately represent us as federal employees. We need to be cognizant of the impact of not require Agency gif/jpg files etc. as signature attachments as this can pose issue attachment issues with mobile devices and show unnecessary attachments that may be confused with actual attachments in the email communication.	2/11/2018	2/11/2018	NULL

ARS Email Signatures	In the initial email I think it is helpful to have all contact information: Full Name, Title, Agency/Branch, Physical address, phone numbers and email. On the response, their name and phone numbers are all I feel are necessary. But I think standardized signatures are a great idea!	2/9/2018	2/9/2018	NULL
Mine mine mine	Whaaaaat!!!! How can you take away the last bit of personality in the automated, animatronic, sterile and robotic world of communication that now exists. I say no, it's mine mine mine. It is precisely because what was presented in the last idea, that is, the information is often already known; that the signature is a part of the document, not to convey information, but to convey feeling! Of course signatures need to be non-offensive, but then again, so does everything written above the signature as well. (b) (6)	2/9/2018	2/9/2018	NULL
Minimal!	I think "basic contact info" these days is your name, title/division, and one phone number you are reliably reachable at. If someone is receiving an email from you, they already have your email address. It's rare that anyone needs your physical mailing address anymore; if they do, they can email you and ask you for it. I find a lot of ARS signature blocks way too long. (b) (6) Even that looks long to me!	2/9/2018	2/9/2018	

Chinese Visa Requirements	<p>When our travelers apply for a visa to China we send in our visa applications, government passports, photo's, and money orders. They are then checked and the packet is sent to FAS to get the state letter. After approval everything is returned to the traveler. The traveler then drives to the embassy with the packet to apply for the visa in person. When the traveler goes to pick up the visa the embassy says no payment is needed. The traveler then returns the money order to get a refund but is not refunded for the fee to get the money order. The embassy we go to does accept credit cards. In the original packet can we send the website page that says our embassy allows credit cards, that way our travelers don't have to worry about getting a money order? Thanks for your time!</p>	2/7/2018	4/11/2018	<p>4/11/2018 Thank you for your submission into Y2C and your question regarding the submission of the money order in the original package for a Chinese VISA. The NCRBSC Travel office has reached out to USDA - Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), which processes VISA's for ARS travelers, and received guidance that a Money Order does not need to be submitted in the original Chinese VISA packet. Due to this guidance, a money order will no longer be required in the original packet that is submitted to the BSC Travel Specialists for processing. What does this mean for travelers? When submitting your foreign travel documents, do not include a copy of your payment method. Once the Chinese Letter has been received (either mailed to the location via UPS or picked up directly at FAS's office in DC), the traveler will then apply in person at the Chinese Consulate.</p>
				<p>The traveler, prior to applying in person, should research online or call ahead to verify what form of payment will be required for the processing fees of his or her "Official Visa." On March 9th, a Greenie was sent out to notify travel arrangers of this change and FTIS has also been updated. If you have additional questions on steps required to obtain a Chinese Visa, please contact your servicing Travel Specialist. Thank you again for your question and we hope that this resolves the additional costs locations have been charged when refunding a money order.</p>

Implement an anonymous complaint channel to combat organizational bias	<p>ARS has directed all supervisors to complete a suite of training related to supervising employees. The required training on “Overcoming Unconscious Bias in the Workplace” stresses that organizations need to put in place systems designed to “combat organizational bias.” The recommended remedy in the training was to “set up an anonymous complaint channel” where employees can raise concerns. I am suggesting that we implement an anonymous complaint channel to combat organizational bias. Our ARS required training is teaching all our supervisors that this is valuable and important, and yet we currently provide no means for our employees to provide anonymous complaints.</p>	2/7/2018	3/28/2018	<p>3/28/2018 ARS works hard to combat organizational bias and encourages employees to bring it to the attention of leadership whenever it is perceived. There are numerous ways an employee can choose to notify Agency leaders - some are anonymous and others are more “confidential” in nature. The most effective way to address it may depend on the form that the bias takes. If it is bias in hiring, it would be appropriate to bring it to the attention of the Agency EEO Observer that serves on interview panels. The role of the EEO observer is to ensure that all candidates are treated fairly and equitably and to ensure that interviews are conducted without bias. If it has to do with position recruitment, the Area ODEO Program Manager works closely with hiring managers to ensure that positions are recruited as widely as possible and without bias. If the bias is not related to hiring, but to internal promotions or general treatment of employees in the workplace, the employee could always reach out confidentially to the Area Director, Area ODEO Program Manager, Director of Human Resources, or Director of the Office of Outreach, Diversity and Equal Opportunity (ODEO).</p>
				<p>The “Your Two Cents” portal is another tool for employees to express and surface issues of concern. With the new Y2C, employees can choose to be anonymous to other users of the site or to provide their name with their posting. On Y2C, employees will receive a written response online, and by using the Y2C platform, it will allow others to see the issue and provide additional information, especially if the issue is widespread. Lastly, there is a more formal route that includes an OIG hotline complaint that is filed with the Department. The Department would follow-up with an investigation of the Agency to learn more about the allegations they receive.</p>

Conferences, All Other Doodle Polls, and Late Memos	I submitted a new conference using an All Other Doodle Poll, but think I did it wrong. How can I find out if the conference I submitted is, or is not, added to the list of conferences, that with my name as an attendee is really linked to that conference, and attendee name and new conference were received by the due date?	2/7/2018	3/20/2018	<p>3/20/2018 The Travel Policy and Systems Branch provides status reports of all Doodle Poll entries to Travel Specialists, Administrative Officers, Secretaries, Program Support Assistants, Research Leaders, and National Program Leaders each week. The reports are extracted directly from the Doodle Poll website. There is a report for each conference and a separate report for the "All Other Conferences" Doodle Poll. If you are not included in the report distribution, please contact your PSA for a copy of the report. The "All Other Conferences" report has a specific tab entitled "Filtered". If your conference was added to this poll, you should select that tab and locate your conference. Once you have done so, select the plus (+) sign at the far left of the row. This will expand the previously collapsed detailed entries and allow the viewer to verify Doodle Poll entries for his or her conference(s). Walkthrough instructions for using the "All Other Conferences" report and additional information can be found "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/FMAD/Travel/Pages/Conference-Approvals-and-Attendance-Requests.aspx#Add" HERE on Axon.</p>
				<p>Viewing the conference reports will provide all of the information needed to determine if the conference you submitted has been added and that your name is linked with that conference. The Doodle Poll report does not include date and time stamps, however any comments added to the poll will include a date and time stamp. Viewing the status report provides an indication of the particular week a Doodle Poll was completed. Note that FMAD continues to receive and add Doodle Poll entries to preapproval packages well after the due date, up to the point that the package is submitted to the approving official.</p>

Email Signature Blocks	<p>For a while now, I have heard laments about the proliferations of signature blocks that are misrepresenting, unethical, and sometimes lacking USDA/ARS identity. In my previous career (b) (6)</p> <p>everyone was asked to use a template and only plug in their essential information. That is not hard to do and it improves corporate image and branding. I would like to see the ARS implement a signature block template.</p>	2/7/2018	2/13/2018	<p>2/13/2018 - We've created a Challenge asking for thoughts on this Idea. Please check it out on the Challenges tab! We'll share results when the Challenge has concluded.</p>
Required software making laptops almost unusable	<p>I'm not really sure what the technical nature of my problem is, but I suspect it is related to government-required software installed on new laptops. On two recently purchased, high end Windows laptops, the computer's performance is so poor that they are almost unusable. Neither local IT staff nor the laptop manufacturer are able to help. This problem cropped up before the recent BitLocker drive encryption was pushed out. I'm not asking you to solve MY problem, but if you hear of such problems from others, can you please investigate?</p>	1/30/2018	3/30/2018	<p>3/30/2018 - We're sorry to hear you've been having these computer problems. We have many different types of environments in ARS that have their own unique computing complexities so we spoke with OCIO and a few IT Specialists about this. As we all know, it's hard to troubleshoot or give specific fixes without knowing the exact situation you are facing, but we do want you to get the help necessary to get your work done. We're not exactly sure that we can correlate your issue to a specific event, but here are a few things we can share: - Windows 10 - We've had some growing pains with Windows 10, if you use that. A HQ/field team was formed to work on these issues and some Locations have been more successful in the rollout than others. Your local IT Contact can contact the "mailto:helpdesk@ars.usda.gov">ARS Helpdesk if this is an issue. - BitLocker - We were told that there was about a week of confusion over BitLocker while some issues were addressed. If there are additional problems with BitLocker, your local IT can contact "mailto:noc@ars.usda.gov">noc@ars.usda.gov and they will direct the issues to the appropriate group.</p>

				<p>We'd also like to offer some overall advice to get IT help in the future. If you have computer issues, your first step is always to contact your local IT support or contact. If they are unable to resolve it, they should escalate the issue to the BSC IT Specialists using the AFMCSP Portal. If needed, the BSC IT Specialists will work with OCIO staff to further troubleshoot the issue or see if it is a widespread problem. They will need to know your operating system, network setup, and other specifics related to the particular issue. We hope this is helpful to get you working smoothly again!</p>
telework eligibility	<p>Will USDA, REE or ARS issue new notifications of telework eligibility to employees based on the OSEC's telework DR? Also, will there be guidance for the locations with CBAs?</p>	1/25/2018	2/27/2018	<p>Telework eligibility determinations are made at the supervisor level based on the duties and responsibilities of the position. Refer to Sections 4a, 4b, and 4c of the "https://www.ocio.usda.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2012/DR%204080-811-002_Telework%20Program.pdf">USDA Telework Departmental Regulation 4080-811-002. Since the criteria for determining telework eligibility did not change, USDA employees will not necessarily receive a new notification of telework eligibility. However, supervisors are encouraged to review telework eligibility determinations to verify that telework is a good fit for the employee and their duties and responsibilities.</p>

				Supervisors are encouraged to communicate telework eligibility to employees in writing. See the " https://axon.ars.usda.gov/HRD/REE-Work-Life-Programs/Pages/Telework-Documents-and-Resources.aspx ">REE Telework Axon site for eligibility notification templates. Locations that have a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) that addresses telework must continue to abide by the terms of the CBA. If you are an employee that is covered by a CBA and will have a telework agreement for 3 or more days per pay period, please write or add "exempt" on the telework agreement form and make sure that your " https://axon.ars.usda.gov/HRD/REE-Work-Life-Programs/Pages/REE-Telework-Contacts.aspx ">AO or BSC telework coordinator receives your telework agreement for data documentation purposes.
Conferences Preapproval (doodle polls) 1 Question and 3 Suggestions	Question: When the list of conferences for each quarter is first sent out and before anyone submits an "Other" doodle poll, where is FMAD getting the names of the conferences? Suggestions: 1) Require conference website be included on "All Other Conferences" doodle polls. 2) Eliminate venue names and addresses (e.g. hotels, universities, convention centers) from the lists; not necessary; save time; makes overall length of list shorter; only need city, state or city, country in that column. 3) Write instructions separately for the 'All Other Conferences' doodle poll and make the instructions more simple, clear, accurate, detailed, thorough, not leave out any basic steps, and only use the same terminology as in the actual doodle poll; e.g., I can't find a field labeled 'Comments' in the doodle poll 'All Other Conferences'.	1/24/2018	2/27/2018	2/27/2018 - Thank you for your suggestions. The list of conferences comes from the annual plan, which is based on conferences historically attended by scientists. A datacall is then issued requesting information on conferences occurring in the upcoming fiscal year that are not included in the list. The annual plan is finalized once updates have been received. Additional conferences may be added throughout the year as necessary.

				<p>Much of the information collected in the All Other Conference Doodle Polls such as venue names and addresses is necessary for comparison purposes and determining conference actuals, per diem, etc. The website information is helpful and should be provided if available (not every conference has a website). One of our Travel Specialists has recently created step-by-step instructions for the "All Other Conference" Doodle Polls including screen shots of the poll fields and specific data to enter. We plan to post these instructions on Axon in the near future and hope you will find them as beneficial as we have.</p>
T&As 1/19/2018 PP-1	<p>Why couldn't Administration send out the requirement before 1/19/2018 mid-afternoon that " all Time and Attendance (T&A) data should be validated, certified and transmitted by close of business (5:00p EST) Friday, January 19th" ? APHIS had multiple notices early in the week. You might say we should have thought of it ourselves, but ARS has us so trained to not assume anything that we don't jump until you say jump. Now, the WebTA program is overwhelmed with everyone trying to use WebTA all at the same time and we can't log in, or won't save entries, or kicks us out. This late "early T&A notice" is another example of the terrible communication from Administration, besides the Pre-conference approval requests (doodle pools), new performance standards forms, changes to the OPAR form, etc., etc. This awful communication must be rectified immediately .</p>	1/19/2018	1/31/2018	<p>1/31/2018 - Thank you for your email. Your frustration is understandable. The uncertainty surrounding these types of situations is great and information is ever-changing. Because of this, guidance is not always distributed to employees as early as we would like but is sent as soon as is practicable. With regard to time and attendance, employees are always able to submit their timecards at any time within the pay period without an official directive to do so. (It would be tantamount to an employee going on vacation and submitting their timecards before the regular due date.) Looking forward, we are working with the webTA vendor to gain additional bandwidth to handle a large number of users simultaneously. We are also compiling a list of lessons learned and specific measures that we will take moving forward to help mitigate these issues.</p>

Generate a database of Scientific Equipment used in Analysis of samples	<p>(b) (6) , I've often thought it would be handy to have a database to refer to for the USDA someplace where I can go and find other locations/ technicians who run the same or similar equipment to myself that I can use as a reference either to see if they have similar problems/ solutions to machine problems, etc. I always call customer service, obviously, but it would be handy to see/ discuss with other location personnel, as well. We run several pieces of equipment on our location that this sort of information could be useful for especially as not all companies customer service departments are as helpful as others. Also when we look for discontinued parts, or are looking to excess machines, it would be handy to have a list of places that utilize similar equipment.</p>	1/18/2018	1/18/2018	
Axon and Greenies	<p>Currently on Axon there are notification pages where all Greenies sent out by a division (AFM/APD/FMAD/FD/HRD) are listed for an entire Fiscal Year. It is great that these greenies are listed, but would it be possible to divide them out by sections? Example: Greenies from the Financial Management and Agreement Division could be separated by Budget, Travel and Agreements. This would help reduce the clutter on the pages and make the pages more user friendly. A way to help support Axon organizing this information is to include a "sub category" on the Originating Office Line of the Greenie. This way Axon staff can quickly see where Greenies should be posted. Also, many times Greenies are sent out without providing trainings/reference material that is already posted on Axon. Could a new section "resources" be included? Included in this section would be the documents that are attached, where to find training/information that supports the greenie, the P&P's, etc. This would reduce the duplicated work and multiple greenies being sent out.</p>	1/8/2018	3/29/2018	<p>3/28/2018 - Thanks for submitting this Idea to make Axon more user-friendly! We're planning to implement this new feature, after some other scheduled projects are completed. We'll announce the change in the Axon announcements once it's gone live. We spoke to AFM leadership, and they will do their best to make sure future Greenies from AFM staff will include background information as much as possible. They also are planning to implement a section on the Greenie template called References that includes links to relevant P&Ps and Axon pages. Thanks for using Y2C!</p>

USDA Telework Policy	<p>The new Team USDA policy of only two telework days a pay period is unnecessarily restrictive to those of us who never see customers in person in our positions. It makes absolutely no difference whether I am in the office or working from home, and my customers frankly can't tell the difference between the two. Individuals who need to be in the office because they serve customers in person should either be judged telework-ineligible or should have the number of telework days restricted in their telework agreement. I don't understand why the rest of us are being forced back into the office because of a few bad apples or a few supervisors who didn't make good decisions with regards to their subordinates' telework agreements. I can now only have the joy of getting MORE work done than at the office while working on my patio or in front of my fireplace, depending on the season. I'm ready for our department to move forward again instead of slipping back into old, inefficient ways of thinking.</p>	1/5/2018	2/27/2018	<p>We hear your concerns and have shared your feedback with the Department. As part of the OneUSDA initiative, the Department is requiring a greater physical presence in all USDA offices. The Department is also encouraging greater collaboration and providing the best customer service to both internal and external stakeholders. USDA believes this change will make us more accountable to the American taxpayer and more accountable to one another. ARS leadership understands that this policy change impacts a large number of our employees and we are working with the Department and internally to ensure that our employees are supported as much as possible while honoring the intent of the new USDA policy.</p>
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Conferences Preapproval Timeliness (doodle polls)	<p>Idea: FMD-Travel get decisions in a timely manner on conference preapprovals from the Deputy Secretary's office decision, such as 6-8 weeks before the travel, even during the holidays or during pay period 26 (use or lose A.L.), and distribute approval or disapproval to employees. There must be someone who is covering duties that have a time factor, even if many FMD-AFM people are gone. Example of what's happening with one conference: 11/21 first call for Requests for Conferences, 2nd quarter. Travelers responded the same day. 12/21 FMAD-Travel said the Acting Deputy Secretary's approval had not been received. 12/29 still not approved. 1/10 airline tickets must be purchased. 1/11 employee is supposed to travel.</p>	12/29/2017	1/24/2018	<p>1/24/2018 - Thanks for your question. Within USDA, hosted and attended conferences are closely monitored by the Department's Office of the Chief Financial Officer, and depending on the cost will require certain levels of approval by the ARS Administrator, the REE Under Secretary, or the Deputy Secretary. Once the package is submitted to OCFO/Deputy Secretary, additional justification and explanations might have to be provided. In order to help expedite the process, FMAD, with the assistance of the Task Order 13 group of the ACES project, is working on multiple fronts to make this process smoother. The changes coming out include updating the current "Conference/Training Attendance, Sponsorship, & Reporting" P&P, utilizing a new portal request ticket (hosted conferences) so hosted conference requests can be submitted daily and compiled more often at the FMAD Division Level, and training webinars. Please watch out for these changes and if you have any questions related to this process, feel free to reach out to your supporting travel specialist and FMAD staff. We are currently in the process of bringing the attended approval process to a more current basis.</p>
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				<p>Doodle polls are used as a mechanism to find out quarterly (ARS ALL) which ARS employees are attending the conferences listed in the annual plan. The attended conference approval packages are prepared based on the Doodle Poll responses. We are still tweaking this process and have provided high level briefings on this process, and will continue to solicit feedback to determine the best way to obtain attendee listings to facilitate preapproval package preparations. Unfortunately, because of the advance approval requirements timeline, Concur data cannot be used for this approval process. Additionally, because some travelers sign up for the conferences closer to the time of the conferences, it would be problematic for a number of scientists if we mandated that all travelers had to sign up for a particular conference six or more months in advance and then “froze” the attendee list.</p>
				<p>We already have a process for identifying hosted and attended conferences for a given year, but the issue is developing the final attendee list for the attended conferences. In general, we have to submit the approval package as one package for the whole Agency, so during a quarterly cycle the early and late responses go into the same package – we cannot submit incomplete packages for approval. As previously indicated, once the package is submitted to OCFO/Deputy Secretary, additional justification and explanations might have to be provided. A commenter on the post mentioned the PAG conference. That’s a great example! We had approximately 120 people sign up for this conference. We were able to submit our approval package to the Department about 6 weeks in advance.</p>

				<p>After that 6 week mark, we had numerous people identify that they, too, would like to attend. One week prior to the conference, the Office of the Secretary contacted Dr. Jacobs-Young, requesting additional information on why it was important for us to have so many people attend. Dr. Jacobs-Young did a great job making the case for all our scientists, and we received approval...but only 1 day in advance of flights. This is not ideal for anyone...but it is the environment we are working under. Many, many travelers do not process their Concur paperwork the 8-9 weeks in advance that would be required for us to submit the package to the Department 6 weeks in advance. So, the doodle polls are a quick, easy way for folks to identify what meetings they are planning to attend. We look forward to making improvements to this process.</p>
AXON Photo of the Month	<p>Rather than 'Photo of the Month' why not photo of the week or photo of the pay period? If done on a monthly basis, only 12 photos will be used. Also, nice to see new things more regularly. Thanks</p>	12/28/2017	2/13/2018	<p>We liked this Idea so much that we implemented it! Check out the new "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/Pages/Photo-Corner.aspx" target="_blank">Photo Corner page on Axon. The three most recent images from the Photo Corner are also shown on the "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/">Axon Home page. Now we need everyone's help - submit your image and short caption to "mailto:axon@ars.usda.gov">axon@ars.usda.gov with a note saying it is for the Axon Photo Corner. Thanks for using Y2C!</p>
USDA FAS	<p>Foreign Agriculture Service has several USDA-approved scientific exchanges to select countries.</p>	12/11/2017	12/11/2017	NULL

Funding through OECD	<p>(b) (6)</p> <p>There seemed to be a pretty high success rate in getting funding. I was not an RL at the time. My RL suggested that I take such a "sabbatical," which was a good idea. I learned new skills and met new collaborators. As a result, I (b) (6) and we have published joint research papers.</p>	12/8/2017	12/11/2017	NULL
Details	<p>As was mentioned during the rollout webinar, (b) (6) and I think it will be a good idea to have new RLs detail to both an Area Office and ONP once every 5 years or so, or at least once within the first 5 years of appointment. RLs will greatly benefit from the face time, from a greater organizational view, and from orientation. Area Offices and ONP will greatly benefit from the help and the field perspective in their work. All will benefit from having RLs exposed to other leadership opportunities for which they may be suited in the future. We have a critical need to identify and develop future ARS leaders.</p>	12/7/2017	12/7/2017	NULL
Organizational Awareness as a topic for consideration	<p>Organizational Awareness , in addition to business processes, leadership, management, career management...etc, may be very beneficial to RL's. ARS units, locations, areas and as an agency are all part of the overall USDA and Federal government framework. Understanding how ARS and it's units fit into this Departmental and Federal organization and how/why decisions are made, what drives initiatives and how ARS communicates/partners or pushes back with USDA can provide great perspective and context to help not only to understand what's going on but also to better communicate with employees. I share this info with new AFM employees as well as when I have an opportunity to meet with new SY's or new RL's. Thank you. - (b) (6)</p>	12/6/2017	12/6/2017	NULL

Travel and "Annual Leave"	How many days off can be taken in conjunction with official travel? Why are weekends and holidays counted as part of the limit of "annual leave"? Does each Area or Location make up their own rules? Is this covered in the FTR? Does the USDA or ARS have an official policy on this? If they do, where is it posted?	11/15/2017	12/19/2017	<p>12/19/2017 - Thanks for the question. The following response provides answers to all your questions. If you would like additional information, you can contact your supporting travel specialist. In addition, you can also view the Federal Travel Regulation (FTR) link "https://www.gsa.gov/policy-regulations/regulations/federal-travel-regulation-ftr">HERE . How many days off can be taken in conjunction with official travel? When taking leave in conjunction with official travel (foreign and domestic travel) up to five (5) calendar days (including weekends and holidays) of personal time may be authorized, not to exceed the number of official business days (excluding travel days).</p>
				<p>Why are weekends and holidays counted as part of the limit of "annual leave"? Holidays and weekends are included, because of the mixture of official and personal travel. Keep in mind all official travel must be in the interest of the government. We don't want to give the appearance that the focus of the trip is personal rather than official. Does each Area or Location make up their own rules? Area/Location offices follow ARS established policy, which can be accessed "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/AFM/Documents/Scheduling%20Leave%20in%20Conjunction%20with%20Official%20Travel.docx">HERE . Is this covered in the FTR? No. GSA gives agencies the discretion to issue policies that are more restrictive, especially when leave is taken while on official travel. Does USDA or ARS have an official policy on this? If they do, where is it posted? . Yes, ARS policy was disseminated to the area/location offices on 8/16/16. You can see the greenie "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/AFM/Documents/2017-3-8%20Scheduling%20Leave%20in%20Conjunction%20with%20Official%20Travel%20Policy%20Update.pdf">HERE on Axon.</p>

Cubicle neighbors socializing noise	<p>Suggestion: ARS tells all employees to stop having long social conversations in cubicles that are louder than a whisper because it negatively affects ARS work. And require supervisors to enforce keeping work areas quiet. We are here to work and other people's talking all the time about non-work topics is extremely distracting and irritating (maddening). Maybe a required AgLearn course on this would be helpful.</p>	11/13/2017	3/14/2018	<p>11/17/2017 - Cubicle life can certainly be full of ups and downs... many feel your pain. We suggest bringing this up with local management as we don't know where you work and not all locations have cubicles (so an ARS-ALL training might not be appropriate). Our team discussed both sides of this issue: the need to have a quiet work environment versus the comraderie of engaged employees connecting at work. We recommend that employees politely request that loud discussions be taken to a breakroom when they happen, and remind people that you are working on a deadline or are having a hard time concentrating. Personally, I am a big fan of headphones as well (if you're not in a lab or have a local policy preventing it). We know this doesn't solve every cubicle noise issue, but we'd also like to hear from others... what tactics have you found helpful in cubicle life?</p>
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Blood Donations	Our location stopped having blood drives probably a couple of years ago because the 30 min. or so that it took to donate was taking too much time away from research (our location never allowed the 4 hr. recuperation time). I would like to suggest that ARS once again make donating blood a priority and encourage locations to do the same.	11/6/2017	11/22/2017	<p>11/22/2017 - What a great suggestion! Thank you for submitting it. Within ARS, decisions about hosting blood drives at work are up to the Location Leadership. Leadership decisions are based on a balance between the benefits of encouraging blood donation and meeting mission goals so hosting blood drives may not always be feasible. That being said, if a location does decide to host a blood drive here are some factors to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once the supervisor approves the employee's donation, they may not dictate how much admin leave the employee uses (see excerpt from the Department's P&P below). Some will return to work unsolicited; some will need the full 4 hours because they're tired or weak after the donation; some will donate and take the 4 hours as their reward for donating, which is ok (the administrative leave is also an incentive for employees to donate). • The time to actually give the blood may be approved as excused absence (regular time) if it takes place at the government facility or administrative leave if it occurs offsite (recovery time is always coded as admin leave).
				<p>As in all cases, communication between the coordinators and leadership is critical. Best practices include: obtain supervisory approval in advance; try to schedule donation at a time during the day that will be the least disruptive. The Departmental P&P says the following: BLOOD DONATION With advance supervisory approval, employees who volunteer as blood donors, without compensation, shall be authorized up to 4 hours of administrative leave on the day the blood is donated for recuperation purposes. This time is in addition to the time required to travel to and from the blood center and to give the blood. Compensated blood donors are required to take annual leave or leave without pay for any period of absence resulting from making the blood donation.</p>

Budget Coffee Talk Teleconferences - THANK YOU!	<p>***Note from Y2C Staff: We edited this idea to remove specific names per our User Agreement.***</p> <p>I have been meaning to post this for sometime and after our last call, feel that there is no time like the present. I want to THANK the Organizer and her Team that do a fantastic job in assisting the Location AO's and Financial Technicians with crucial training and information that is extremely helpful each month. I am on many calls each month, but can truly say that the Coffee Talk calls are the most beneficial and without them it would be impossible to meet all of the deadlines we have pertaining to Budget. Your Communication of relevant topics is so appreciated. I LOOK FORWARD to this call each month. THANK YOU for providing outstanding CUSTOMER SERVICE to us!</p>	10/20/2017	10/20/2017	<p>Thanks for the positive note! This was the perfect opportunity to use "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/Engage/Stars%20Program/Pages/Home.aspx">StARS , by the way... thanks for posting it there, too!</p>
Move the Beltsville GWCC Farmers Market to Wednesdays	<p>The parking lot is full on Wednesdays. Other days of the week, there appear to be a lot fewer vehicles. Perhaps the market would see much more business if it was moved to a day of the week when GWCC was very busy.</p>	10/19/2017	4/20/2018	

<p>Please do not touch your colleagues</p>	<p>Do not touch them on the shoulder, on the arm, on the back. Do not side-hug and definitely do not front hug your colleagues, especially if you are their supervisor, especially if you are the opposite gender, especially if you are an opposite gender supervisor. It doesn't matter what your intentions are. Do not assume that even people that you work closely with are okay with it. It doesn't matter if you were raised and brought up in a time when it was okay to do so. It is not okay now. Just don't go there.</p>	<p>10/18/2017</p>	<p>11/29/2017</p>	<p>11/29/2017 - Thanks, for your comment. Reading this post, it suggests that we all need a reminder to be more socially aware during our day to day interactions with our colleagues no matter how long we have known one-another. In our society it is not uncommon for there to be a touch on the shoulder, the arm, the back or even a hug. However, we all need to understand that not everyone is comfortable with this interaction and in the work place everyone is entitled to their own personal space and should be able to come to work every day without fear that they are going to be subject to unwanted and uncomfortable touching by anyone. For both parties, it is important to step back and observe both the verbal and nonverbal cues during these interactions to ensure understanding and intent. Remember though, not everyone is adept at reading nonverbal cues so it is important to always speak up and let others know your feelings.</p>
				<p>This post does gives us the opportunity to remind everyone that if you are ever subject to behavior in the workplace that makes you uncomfortable, there are places in the Agency you can go for help. When in this situation first, you can look to your chain of command, you can contact the Personnel and Labor Solutions Branch (PALS) or the Office of Diversity, Outreach and Equal Opportunity (ODEO) to discuss your situation.</p>

Travel-contributed less than \$200	The process of requesting approval for contributed travel expense of less than \$200 is not cost effective and wondering if a policy can be created to allow for small amounts, such as \$12 lunch or \$20 dinner, to be added directly to the authorization for approval without all the contributed paperwork (i.e. contributed funds approval, invitation letter, acceptance letter, etc.). This would allow for a more efficient use of time and processing of travel requests. I appreciate your consideration in this matter to make ARS more efficient in relation to travel.	10/3/2017	11/7/2017	11/7/2017 - Thank you for your suggestion. The good news is you can avoid the paperwork for meals under \$20. We contacted the Office of Ethics on this matter and were advised that contributed travel for meals with a market value below \$20 and not exceeding more than \$50 per year from the same source may be accepted via the \$20 rule exception without a need to submit an AD 1101. However, any other travel related expenses over \$20 would require an AD 1101 to be processed, since this is the only mechanism available for the review and acceptance of gifts over \$20. Transparency and documentation allows us to avoid any appearance of impropriety, as well as comply with the ethics rules and laws.
Dwayne Cordray's efforts during Hurricane Harvey showcased in USDA Tweets		9/29/2017	9/29/2017	NULL
Status of Center Director vacancies	NCAUR (Peoria, IL) has been without a Center Director for at least a year and completed candidate interviews in January 2017. WRRRC (Albany, CA) just recently posted the vacancy on usajobs. What is the status of these positions?	9/21/2017	10/18/2017	10/17/2017 - Thank you for your inquiry. Unfortunately, Your Two Cents is not the proper platform for relaying specific recruitment information. Please contact Human Resources or your local leadership with your inquiry.
Defending science.	How do we restore the public's trust in science given the current political environment?	9/13/2017	9/13/2017	NULL
For all the Inductees	What do you do to keep yourself balanced between work and home life? Do you think your home life suffered because of work or vice versa?	9/8/2017	9/8/2017	NULL
Science Talk Question	What strategies have you found effective to increase collaboration and morale within a team?	9/7/2017	9/7/2017	NULL
Leave donations?	Will people who have damaged homes etc be eligible for leave donations (if they need them) as a result of Hurricanes Harvey or Irma? Has this ever happened before?	9/7/2017	9/7/2017	NULL

Performance Plans FY18	<p>We just received the new form REE-435 E/S, Performance Plan, Progress Review and Appraisal Worksheet for Non-Supervisory and Supervisory Positions. The policy states: Performance plans for fiscal year (FY) 2018 must be documented, in writing, on the appropriate REE-435E (Non-Supervisory) or REE-435S (Supervisory). Questions: Why is it being replaced so soon after the recent issuance of the current version? (yes, 3 yrs is too soon) What is different about the content from the current version? Can existing employees' current 435s be grandfathered in; and we only start using the new version as each new employee is hired? Do all the Elements have to be re-written for every single employee?</p>	9/5/2017	9/29/2017	<p>9/29/2017 - Each year the Performance and Awards Staff (PAS) is required by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) to conduct a Performance Plan Audit. The audit of 2017 Performance Plans sampled approximately 500 performance plans across the Research, Education, and Economics (REE) Mission Area. The audit required PAS to review the plans and communicate with employees across REE.</p>
	<p>If "yes", why wasn't the new version sent out sooner to give us more time ? The Area and Location always move the due date back by 2 weeks, leaving us even less time for this. The supervisors and support staff have a lot of other things to do besides this. Transferring the Elements from one version to the next is a great waste of employee time which Does have a dollar value. I know of one unit that has 68 federal employees, of which only 2 do the office work. I ask ARS to reconsider making the new version mandatory for all existing positions.</p>			<p>PAS identified common requests, concerns, and issues with the AD-435, which began a process of revising the form. Some of the common issues identified were inability to digitally sign progress reviews, complexity of the plan, formatting issues, confusion of performance audit requirements, and Adobe compatibility errors. As a result, these areas were addressed and improved in the REE-435. The REE-435 provides enhanced automation, links to tools and resources, incorporation of regulations to clearly communicate requirements, and improved formatting to allow for better use of space and even expansion of columns. The REE-435S also incorporates language into the supervisory standards that meets the requirements for approximately half of the performance audit items.</p>

				<p>For example, the required language for “Employee Perspective” and “Customer Perspective” are already included as part of the non-revisable elements of the form. Supervisors and rating officials still have the option of adding to the generic language, but will meet the audit requirements if they do not. This revision reduces the work on supervisors and drastically improves Fiscal Year 2018 Performance Plan Audit metrics. PAS began communicating with leadership about these forms in March 2017, and incorporated feedback and recommendations from the Research Leader Advisory Council, Administrative and Financial Management Council, Administrative Officer Steering Committee, and several other professional groups and committees.</p>
				<p>Additionally, PAS provided periodic updates to the Administrator’s Council and agency leadership. The reason for the delayed release of these forms was a new Non-SES Performance Plan requirement by USDA’s Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM). The new requirement was released on August 29, 2017, and necessitated further revision of the REE-435 to incorporate the changes. If the REE 435 would have been released prior to the revision required by OHRM, it would have increased the workload and required an additional form to be completed. This would have been extremely burdensome for employees across REE; for this reason, leadership decided to delay the release of the form. Per OHRM Advisory Memo 2017-006, dated August 29, 2017, the new standards are required for all Fiscal Year 2018 supervisory performance plans, and does not provide for a “grandfather in” period.</p>

				<p>The new Department AD-435 is a Microsoft Word document, which all employees would have been required to use if the REE-435 had not been implemented. Additionally, the new AD-435 does not address the concerns identified by the REE audit nor does it provide the enhanced automation of the REE-435. Why is it being replaced so soon after the recent issuance of the current version? The current version has been replaced to add convenience as all required documents were compiled into one file and now has the capability to sign electronically for midyear review. The template includes the following forms which were previously separated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 435E/S Performance Plan w/Rating form • REE 435E/S Award form • 435E/S Justification for Outstanding or Unacceptable Rating
				<p>In addition to the benefits listed above, the requirement to transfer performance standards onto the REE-435 provides an opportunity to revisit and evaluate the performance standards for FY18, which is required annually per Departmental Regulation 4040-430. The REE-435 was found to be so beneficial that OHRM requested PAS provide a briefing to all USDA agencies. This was so well received that several agencies external to the REE Mission Area have adopted it for their performance management processes.</p>

				<p>In order to ensure understanding of the form's functionality and a smooth transition, PAS provided several live webinars on the REE-435, during which a historic background of the form, a hands-on demonstration of the improvements, and a live question and answer period was given. Approximately 800 employees in REE participated. A webinar recording can be accessed by clicking "https://connect16.uc.att.com/usda/meet/recording_manual_entry.asp?RecordingKey=15C9C0DF-6504-4C2A-A29D-5E264BCD0E2C" target="_blank">HERE . If you have any further questions regarding the REE-435, please contact Michael Barreca, Section Head, PAS, at (301) 504-1387 or michael.barreca@ars.usda.gov. We appreciate your hard work in achieving this requirement as we know the end of the fiscal year is a very busy time. Keep up the good work and know that even when we must meet deadlines, we're aware of the effort you put in every year and try hard to ease transitions as they come to you.</p>
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Overwhelming Response	<p>My Wife, (b) (6) has been doing a great job recording our triumphs on Facebook: Today (02SEP17) was amazing day!! I have no words to describe but talk about good people!! A couple name (b) (6) dropped their kids off to relatives and drove down here to help us. My friend (b) (6) worked tirelessly 2nd time coming out here You rock (b) (6)!!! Thank you (b) (6) and (b) (6) for coming to town to help us cut wood and rake. Two guys from Mission Texas cleared out our front fence. Complete strangers are my friends for life. We have a lot more to get done. Cannot thank you all enough for your help. Im exhausted! Day two clean up!!! Same amazing people we had yesterday came back today Including (b) (6) (b) (6) joined in!! Sunburn, tired, I drank so much gatorade, Powerade, SPARK drinks, bottles waters kept sweating hot day!</p>	9/5/2017	9/5/2017	NULL
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	<p> Day 3 (LaborDay 04SEP17) clean up!!! This is the hardest job We ever had to do and could not of done it without my Volunteers!! Thank you (b) (6)</p> <p> Before leaving for Kerrville, I took a panoramic to record all the hard work that has been done at (b) (6)</p> <p>! </p>			
Hurricane Harvey	Thinking of those affected by Hurricane Harvey.	8/30/2017	9/5/2017	NULL
Hurricane Harvey	Thinking of those affected by Hurricane Harvey.	8/30/2017	8/30/2017	NULL

ARIS breaks down frequently	<p>The ARIS program, research section, frequently has problems working correctly. Does a part of this program and it's components need to be replaced? Are there plans to make ARIS and it's components more reliable? What is causing the problems all the time? What can be done about it? This week I have a deadline to meet and can't get the work done because of this. This happens much too often. Thank you.</p>	8/28/2017	9/6/2017	<p>9/6/2017 - On July 28th, all ARIS systems (including CATS, SAMS, etc) were moved to the Microsoft Azure Cloud and are no longer dependent on equipment in Beltsville, MD. This was a needed step to provide more reliability in the future. During this process, the applications remained unchanged although changes were made to the configuration and servers housing these systems. Over the past few weeks, there have been a few unanticipated issues that necessitated some fine tuning. OCIO strives to address all issues as quickly as possible. They have taken every possible step to minimize the interruptions and have concentrated on assuring the system would be available with no downtime for the last few weeks of the fiscal year.</p>
USDA Ethics App	<p>I know that this is from the department and not from ARS itself, but I want to give kudos for the new ethics app. It is surprisingly good. It's very well organized, informative, and easy to use. It makes finding and understanding ethics guidelines for just about anything quick and painless. Anyway, my two cents are that this would be worth promoting the use of at ARS as a supplement to all of the annual training that we receive on various ethics topics.</p>	8/24/2017	9/20/2017	<p>9/20/2017 - Thanks for posting this, we agree! We'll share your kudos with the USDA Office of Ethics and will look into sharing it for training.</p>
Does ARS have an IRB?	<p>Does ARS have an Institutional Review Board (IRB) for studies involving human subjects? If so, what is the process for submitting research proposals to the IRB?</p>	8/22/2017	9/20/2017	<p>9/20/2017 - Thanks for your question. ARS does not have an IRB, which was eliminated more than 20 years ago. The six ARS Human Nutrition Research Centers rely on local IRB's for approval of human studies. There is a P&P on this (No. 605.1 "https://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/media/10444/pp605-1.pdf">https://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/media/10444/pp605-1.pdf) available on this AFM website.</p>

Floors Not Being Swept or Mopped at (b) (6)	<p>Melwood recently received a new Site Supervisor at (b) (6) upon taking over this person eliminated the 4-5 man crew that routinely swept and mopped the floors twice a weeks. Now people in multiple buildings have reported that their buildings have not been swept or mopped in months . The sweeping and mopping duties were supposed to be reassigned to the smaller trash crews, doubling their current duties. However it's not getting done, and the Site Supervisor is not being responsive to this concern. Any assistance would be appreciated.</p>	8/17/2017	9/27/2017	<p>9/27/2017 - We spoke to the staff that oversees Melwood. They clean 80+ buildings and need a work order number to refer to about complaints. They told us that occupants should email ARS-BA-FMS ("mailto:ARS-BA-FMS@ars.usda.gov">ARS-BA-FMS@ars.usda.gov) to get a work order number & CC "mailto:Jermaine.Winstead@ars.usda.gov">Jermaine.Winstead@ars.usda.gov on the email, who has assured us he will be proactive and contact the supervisor with any complaints.</p>
IT security with scientific equipment	<p>Many of our scientific instrumentation providers, while based in the USA, manufacture their instruments in another country (for example, China). Is it possible that there are potential security threats from the installed software/hardware. While most instruments are not connected to the internet or intranet, they may be on a machine or laboratory network for data acquisition, control, and data analysis. We frequent download data from the instrument onto a thumb drive and then copy to our desktop computers that are connected to the internet. Does ARS/USDA address this potential security threat?</p>	8/15/2017	9/20/2017	<p>9/20/2017 - Great question! Yes, ARS takes an approach of defense in depth to combat security threats like the one you describe. First, all ARS network-connected computers are running Symantec anti-virus software, which scans your thumb drive as soon as you plug it in looking for known viruses and some malicious software. Second, all ARS network-connected computers are licensed to run MalwareBytes, a more comprehensive anti-malware product that can identify additional issues not recognized by Symantec. Deployment of MalwareBytes is complete to the majority of ARS computers. If your computer does not yet have the software, please follow your standard IT support process to have it installed. Third, the firewalls and intrusion detection system installed at the ARS network perimeter are updated several times a day with information about Internet sites where malicious software is known to hide information when stolen. Those Internet sites are automatically blocked from access once they're reported to our network perimeter security tools. Let us know if you have other questions about ARS' defense in depth approach and thanks for your help. Protecting your computer helps protect the whole ARS network.</p>

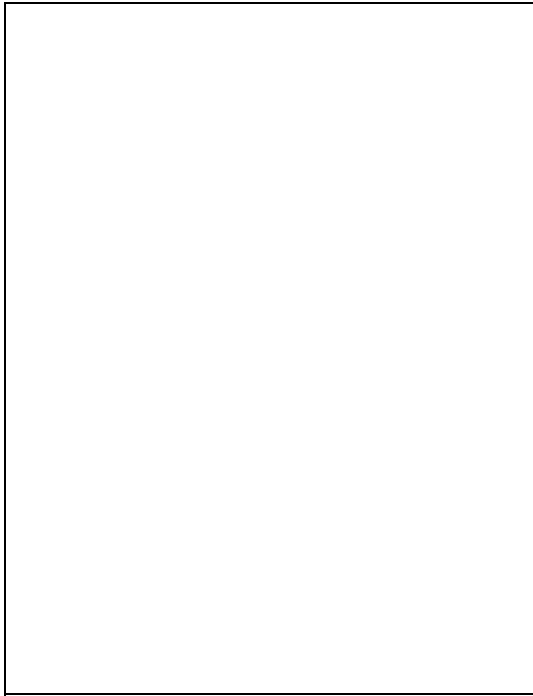
Travel, Europe, OPAR form	<p>Today an email was forwarded to us that originated from an NCRBSC travel specialist. It says, in part: the STEP information isn't included on the OPAR forms, double check forms to European countries and insert this information. Questions: When did you tell us to include it? To whom did you tell it? Insert what information, exactly? Insert it where on the form? Y2C, can you get the answers to these questions and post the answers in your response, please?</p>	8/11/2017	9/6/2017	<p>9/6/2017 - Thanks for the post! Please see below: When did you tell us to include it? To whom did you tell it? We searched and searched and could not find any newly released email (greenie) to tell folks about these updated requirements...so, we asked AFM to distribute it and the greenie was published August 28, 2017, entitled, "Updated Official Passport Action Request (OPAR) Form – 2014 Final (Updated 06-2017)". A copy can be found here on AXON: "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/AFM/Pages/Financial-Management-Agreements.aspx">https://axon.ars.usda.gov/AFM/Pages/Financial-Management-Agreements.aspx Insert what information, exactly? Travelers must provide a cell phone number, personal email address and indicate whether enrolled in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program on the OPAR-2014 (06/2017).</p>
				<p>U.S. Embassies are now requesting various methods of contact, on country clearance requests, in the event of an emergency. Travelers are now required to provide their cell phone number and personal email address while abroad, on all electronic country clearance requests. Travelers have the option of registering their trips with State Department Smart Traveler Program (STEP). Registration is voluntary and the cost is free. The service allows U.S. citizens traveling abroad to enroll their trip with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate.</p>

				<p>The benefit to enrolling in STEP: - Receive important information from the Embassy about safety conditions in your destination country, helping you make informed decisions about your travel plans. - Help the U.S. Embassy contact you in an emergency, whether natural disaster, civil unrest, or family emergency. - Help family and friends get in touch with you in an emergency. For more information on the Department of State Smart Traveler Program go their website:</p> <p>"http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/go/step.html">http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/go/step.html Insert it where on the form? Enter on the OPAR-2014 (06/2017), Part B (Employee Information) - enter the traveler's personal email address. Part D (Personal Information) - enter the traveler's cell phone number. Part M (Other Embassy Requested Information) - Those travelers who have registered for STEP should indicate here that they have registered for the program. We hope this helps. Also, thanks for letting us know that this guidance was inadvertently overlooked!</p>
Challenge Notes: President's Budget Proposal for Fiscal Year 2018	<p>The President's Budget Proposal for Fiscal Year 2018 was released on May 23, 2018. ARS's budget is shown "https://www.obpa.usda.gov/18arsexnotes2018.pdf">here. Although the Secretary sent a message out about the budget (available on "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/Administrators%20Corner/Pages/Budget.aspx">Axon's Budget page), we are sure there are lots of questions out there about what this means for ARS. As such, Dr. Jacobs-Young is holding an Inform & Engage Webinar on the President's Budget Proposal for Fiscal Year 2018 on June 9 at 2:30 p.m. eastern time. What questions do you have for her?</p>	8/9/2017	8/9/2017	

Retirement Planning Seminars	Would it be possible for ARS locations to offer retirement planning seminars - this may help those of us who are eligible for retirement make the decision. I think that many of those with 20+ 30+ 40+ years in service might not have considered that they could have a financially-stable and comfortable retirement with the earned benefits.	8/9/2017	8/22/2017	<p>8/22/2017 - Great question! The easy/quick answer is: yes. Locations may offer retirement planning seminars. Please check with your Administrative Officer on the best options and alternatives for your location. You may be interested in knowing that our Work Life 4 You program has on-demand webinars, articles, financial calculators, and educational guides available for ARS employees and household members at no cost. Instructions for accessing this information can be found on the EAP Axon REE Work/Life Program page here:</p> <p>"https://axon.ars.usda.gov/HRD/REE-Work-Life-Programs/Pages/Home.aspx">https://axon.ars.usda.gov/HRD/REE-Work-Life-Programs/Pages/Home.aspx . Additionally, OPM has many tools and information regarding retirement you may want to check out "https://www.opm.gov/retirement-services/">https://www.opm.gov/retirement-services/ . This OPM site also has information on the latest scams and aggressive marketers regarding retirement.</p>
FacilityDude - Operations Management Software	We understand this application is being introduced in multiple ARS Locations as a work order system. The corporate /product name doesn't reflect the Agency's commitment to diversity in the workplace.	8/8/2017	8/28/2017	<p>8/28/2017 - The Facility Dude computerized maintenance management system (CMMS) program is an "off the shelf" software program, named by the company. It is not a name Facilities Division or the Government chose. The program is used by numerous Federal Government agencies for managing facility maintenance activities, and is simple and affordable. The Facility Dude program represents value to the Government because of the simplicity and cost.</p>

Idea for Y2C site	<p>When a user votes no, they must be required to click one choice from a list of reasons why they voted no, before their no vote is accepted. Choices: 1) Just accept the regulation or policy and don't complain. 2) That doesn't affect me, therefore it shouldn't even be on here. 3) I just don't like your idea. 4) That's a dumb idea. 5) I'm just a negative person. 5) Other ____.</p>	8/4/2017	9/6/2017	<p>9/6/17- The system doesn't offer that functionality, sorry! The new Y2C is based on an off-the-shelf software program, so we are limited in the changes that can be made to its interface. One of the features we would change if we could is that once a vote is entered, it can't be changed. A downvote might be an errant click and it can't be taken back—so hopefully no one takes them too personally! We'd also like to add that if a person has other thoughts that they would like to share, the comments option associated with each idea is a great place to express these thoughts. Thanks for using Y2C and keep the ideas coming!</p>
Use of Concur for hotel reservations	<p>We have recently been informed that it will strictly be enforced that hotel reservations will be made through Concur. Any time Concur is called there is a charge for speaking to the operator even if you're calling to correct a mistake made by Concur. Without going into various other issues with use of Concur, I would point out that the charges add up very quickly and consume financial resources that could be better utilized in other areas. I have personally experienced issues where the hotel reservation made by Concur was not within walking distance (as promised) and I ended up dragging my luggage through the snow for about a mile and a half as a result. When a flight was cancelled (b) (6) a year ago, in addition to Concur stating that an emergency fee would be charged and having to wait for over 30 minutes on the phone before reaching a representative, the end result was that the Concur employee was unable to make a room reservation for me. I had to call the hotel and make the reservation myself. With the recent implementation of this new policy, our secretary contacted Concur related to reservations for a scientist attending a meeting in another country.</p>	8/2/2017	10/18/2017	<p>10/18/2017 - Thank you for your question. We understand that it feels like a really big change and hope our response will help explain things more clearly. Under law, Federal travelers are required to use the electronic Travel System (ConcurGov) to make their lodging reservations. This law is not new...in fact, it has been around since at least 2004. What has changed is that the systems we use today are much more transparent and sophisticated. ConcurGov provides a number of mechanisms to monitor how reservations are made, most noticeably with pre-audit flags during reservations and in travel authorizations and vouchers, and so monitoring and enforcement have become very easy for those charged with doing so. Reserving hotel rooms outside of ConcurGov should only be considered in rare and unusual circumstances.</p>

	<p>Concur did not make the reservation but used the confirmation number for the previous reservation (made months earlier) and charged USDA for providing service. For our research objectives, we frequently have travel situations where it is difficult to predict what town will be the final destination for a particular evening. With budgets being tighter and tighter it seems illogical to force employees to use their research dollars to pay for service they either do not receive, or that they can do much better by themselves. By removing this requirement for booking hotels through Concur, it will expedite the work of scientists, reduce costs for services that in many instances are not needed, and increase funds available for addressing research objectives.</p>			<p>A good example would be field work. Often there isn't a specific itinerary set for field work because it is reliant on so many external factors including weather, location, and growing conditions. If you don't know where you'll be stopping for the night, it may be impractical to make reservations through ConcurGov. The next best option would be to call BCD Travel directly. Reserving directly through BCD ensures that the lodging chosen is fire safety compliant, and within per diem for that location. These factors are important to us because they protect our travelers. Please remember that it is NEVER acceptable to book through other Commercial Reservation Systems such as Expedia, Kayak, Travelocity, Hotels.com, etc. Conference lodging can present unique challenges for reservations. If you have any concerns related to conference lodging reservations, please contact your Travel Specialist for assistance. Your Travel Specialist will be able to advise you on the best way to proceed with conference lodging reservations.</p>
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		<p>Depending on the circumstances, arrangements, and requirements, the best option might be to book directly with the conference vendor. The best way to protect yourself, including complying with the law and limiting out of pocket (non-reimbursable) expenses, is to seek advice from your Travel Specialist. In regards to which hotels are shown in the ConcurGov search results, the available hotel information is fed to ConcurGov through the Global Distribution System, Sabre, which provides choices for Fedrooms hotels. In ConcurGov, FedRooms are listed first and are usually at or below per diem rate. Thus, the hotel reservation system and FedRooms are two separate processes. If a hotel does not list available rooms in the hotel reservation system used by ConcurGov, then the hotel will not appear in the ConcurGov search results. However, if the hotel appears in the ConcurGov search results, it will probably be listed at the top of the search results if it is a FedRooms hotel.</p>
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				<p>If a particular hotel is not listed, contact the Travel Management Center (TMC) to check for availability. Lodging should be booked in ConCurGov or through the TMC. There are advantages to booking in a FedRooms hotel: lodging rates are set at or below per diem rates; there are no add-on fees; and the room cancellation deadline is 4 p.m. (or later) on the day of arrival. We realize that the charges related to using BCD are an additional expense to the agency; however, there really is no other option. Use of the electronic system is mandatory by law. The fees BCD charges are set by the contract for all of USDA. If you feel BCD is not providing quality service, please contact your Travel Specialist with your examples. We hope we have addressed your concerns related to enforcement and compliance with existing law. If you have any other questions please contact your Travel Specialist. Thank you again for using the Your Two Cents platform to address your concerns. Y2C is an excellent way to get answers and explanations and ensure that information is shared as widely as possible.</p>
LA appointment tracker idea	<p>Idea for an easier LA appointment tracker for those limited to 1039 hours (seasonal and intermittent): Column 1, pay periods (PP# 's) during the appointment. Column 2: number of days in paid status for each whole pay period. Column 3: number of hours in paid status during each pay period. Timekeeper, employee, or supervisor can get the numbers directly from each pay period in WebTA. Make this form a new alternative Official L/A appointment tracker.</p>	7/31/2017	8/14/2017	<p>8/14/2017 - Thanks to the writer of this post - it is a great idea! The current L/A Tracker, used to record the hours worked by seasonal or intermittent L/A's, may be modified to provide users with an enhanced tracking tool. What's been suggested in this idea is definitely worth exploring further to determine if and how we might enhance the current L/A Tracker. I recommend that the individual who developed the alternative tracker contact Cathy Walker, L/A Program Manager at 301-504-4418 or cathy.walker@ars.usda.gov to discuss this matter further. New and innovative ideas to improve work processes are always welcomed.</p>

SOP Challenge Notes	<p>The SOP Challenge has concluded, and the team is hard at work to go through the requests. Here are the notes of the Challenge. It's your turn to challenge us! What SOPs would you like to see? We need your help to identify needed SOPs. We heard your previous requests, and are focusing key efforts in the area of Standard Operating Procedure creation. We need your input to tell us which topic-specific SOPs you want or need the most, so we challenge you to give us the top 5 you would like to see created or revamped. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I need an SOP for foreign travel. • I need an SOP for making someone a purchase card holder. • I need an SOP for foreign visitors. <p>Challenge us! We are listening.</p>	7/26/2017	7/26/2017	7/26/2017 - The SOP Challenge has concluded, and the team is hard at work to go through the requests. Here are the notes of the Challenge.
'SOP' on "Where to Find it in Axon: A Guide for the Research Unit PSA/Secretary"	<p>Need a guide on where to find instructions, specifically, not just saying it's on "Axon". Examples: Some information on Incoming Funds is on the page for scientists and is not in the Agreements section. Foreign Visitor instructions are on the "AO" page; I would have never thought to look there, and didn't even know the AO page existed, and why would I look on the AO page if I'm not an AO. How about one list that has all the things a Research Unit PSA/Secretary needs to look up? "PSA/Secretary Guide Where to Find it on Axon". - because stuff is all over the place depending on which department handles stuff eventually.</p>	7/26/2017	7/26/2017	The SOP Challenge has concluded, and the team is hard at work to go through the requests.

I need a in-processing SOP for new hires and an out-processing for departing personnel.	I recommend an in-processing and an out-processing SOP. By doing this, it will help to make sure that a given person does not fall through the cracks, but will ensure that the employee sees the proper administration personnel. This check list will need to be signed by each departmental authority administrator like SY, IT, Saftey, AO, and HR. This will ensure the employee must visit each of these departments. The checklist will contain the tasks that each department administration must do. For example, the supervisor of a new hire will need to make sure they provide a tour of the facility. For an out-processing individual, they should meet with IT so that any valuable equipment and data can be secured. During this time the IT person can verify the individuals last day and ensure access to IT systems like local computer access is rescinded at the appropriate time. To help make it easier to creat the SOP. I recommend tasking each department supervisor with coming up with the necessary steps that must be done for an in-processing and an out-processing individual.	7/26/2017	7/26/2017	The SOP Challenge has concluded, and the team is hard at work to go through the requests.
Financial Calendar	Not so much in need of a SOP but a Financial Planning 12-month calendar that lists everything an AO and/or FT needs to accomplish by quarter, month, week. It would help new AOs and FTs as well as interns know what is expected by when on a routine basis or when certain financial functions should take place. For example: ULO reports (monthly? quarterly? both?), entering VOs, monitoring VOs, reconciliation (monthly until EOY then weekly?).	7/21/2017	7/26/2017	The SOP Challenge has concluded, and the team is hard at work to go through the requests.

SOP Request	<p>I know some of these may already be on AXON, so, if they are, I would ask that they be reviewed for simplicity and accuracy (as if for a brand new AO or FT). 1. Agreement contract processing from financial perspective (documentation preparation, tracking remaining funding, accurately computing billing) 2. Using SAMS, projecting salaries for upcoming FY, ensuring that WGIs, promotions, recalculating projected salaries through end of FY, entering/rolling over SAMS 3. Submitting FY CAM 4. Manage expenses for utilities (AMERESCO, METTEL); monitoring VOs for utility and phones 5. Submitting funds received to lockbox 6. Updating CATS financial plan 7. Inventory reconciliation; processing real and personal property inventories; document preparation 8. Updating CPAIS with new property purchases 9. Use of PROP software to keep inventory up-to-date</p>	7/21/2017	7/26/2017	The SOP Challenge has concluded, and the team is hard at work to go through the requests.
SOP Request-OMSP Program	<p>An SOP on performing OMSP physicals at the location would be beneficial. One version utilizing the Federal Occupational Health (FOH) program regarding signing the contract, collecting USDA182Bs, billing/scheduling, down to the physical and payment for services. Also need an SOP in a situation in which the location is not using the FOH to perform OMSP services.</p>	7/20/2017	7/26/2017	The SOP Challenge has concluded, and the team is hard at work to go through the requests.

Software Licenses	<p>Please create an SOP for obtaining software licenses. This will need to be decision tree-style and searchable by software make/model, because every package seems to have a different route to obtain a license. (some examples, and I could be wrong about these: Microsoft Office is managed at the location level, JMP is managed by a few designees in each area, Adobe Acrobat is available ARS-wide [but how does an individual user get a copy?], some technical software packages are only available for purchase directly from the vendor) "Ask your IT Specialist" is not an adequate SOP, especially when technical software is involved. Which packages can be purchased through a BPA? If purchase of an individual license is required, which packages should we look for on GSA vs. buying straight from the vendor? Related: we need a quick way to answer the question "Does USDA/ARS/my area/my location already have a site license for software XYZ?"</p>	7/18/2017	7/26/2017	<p>The SOP Challenge has concluded, and the team is hard at work to go through the requests.</p>
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Rational and humane economy seating policy	<p>As we know the Federal Travel Regulation states that:</p> <p><h5>"§301-10.124 What are coach-class Seating Upgrade Programs?</h5> Sometimes these programs are called "Coach Elite," "Coach Plus," "Preferred Coach" or some other identifier. Under these airline programs, a passenger may obtain for a fee a more desirable seat choice within the coach-class cabin. These airline upgrade or preferred seat choices are generally available for an annual fee, at an airport kiosk or gate or as a frequent flier perk. These coach upgrade options are not considered a new or higher class of accommodation since the seating is still in the coach cabin. However, the use of these upgraded/preferred coach seating options is generally a traveler's personal choice and therefore is at the traveler's personal expense. An agency travel authorization approving official or his/her designee (e.g. , supervisor of the traveler) may authorize and reimburse the additional seat choice fee according to internal agency policy (see "https://www.gsa.gov/portal/ext/public/site/FTR/file/Chapter301p070.html/category/21868/#wp1091806" >301-70.102 (k))."</p>	7/17/2017	1/31/2018	<p>1/31/2018 - ARS will continue to process these requests (including coach class upgrades) on a reasonable accommodation basis. This decision is based on ensuring that all ARS employees are treated fairly and consistently in adjudicating such premium class or coach upgrade requests. Routing these requests through the Office of Outreach, Diversity & Equal Opportunity ensures a fair and consistent process for all ARS employees. In addition to ensuring fairness for ARS employees, the agency is mindful that we have an obligation to taxpayers to minimize costs where possible (especially in today's constrained budget environment), and to maximize the use of funds for ARS' central research mission. The current reasonable accommodation policy supports these fiscal considerations.</p>
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	<p>I would like to propose that ARS bring some humanity back to the flying experience and allow supervisors who have direct responsibilities for office/lab fiscal decisions, to be empowered to determine whether an economy add-on fee for a non-aisle or extra leg room seat is a good choice. In many cases, the add-on fee for a seat isn't even in "economy plus" but is simply an aisle seat, no extra leg room. On longer flights, 6-7 hours to Europe, 10-11 hours to the middle-east; 14 hours to east Asia, it seems like a humane benefit to allow our employees the ability to have 3 extra inches of legroom or sit in an aisle seat. One could argue that when a traveler only has middle seats available when making reservations that their choice has been severely limited. If the ARS standard is to require a medical necessity for business class seats (like any lab/offices can afford that w/out soft funds), then to also have that standard for economy plus seems overly stringent. After all, since many aspects of a flight are now fee based like meals and baggage, maybe we can allow for add-on seat fees as well.</p>			<p>Anyone who has traveled lately knows that "humanity" is not really part of the equation for the airlines. In general, the use of premium class or coach class upgrades may currently be requested as a reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities or other short-term medical needs. (More information on how to obtain a reasonable accommodation may be found in "https://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/media/10864/1222v3.pdf">P&P 122.2.v.3, "Reasonable Accommodation Procedures.") Individuals seeking a reasonable accommodation must substantiate their medical need in writing by a medical professional or other appropriate professional citing the functional limitations. Documentation should include the requirement for premium class travel or coach upgrades and indicate that the disability cannot be accommodated using a cheaper alternative method (example: two coach seats). We appreciate your suggestion.</p>
Presidential Portrait	<p>Currently only the official portrait of USDA Secretary Purdue is hung in the main lobby at our location. I was wondering if other ARS locations having trouble obtaining an official portrait of President Trump.</p>	7/17/2017	8/2/2017	<p>8/2/2017 - The U.S. Government Publishing Office (GPO) is standing by to reproduce copies of the President and the Vice President's photos for official use in Federal facilities, and will do so as soon as the official photo files are provided. There is no current timeline on when GPO may receive those files from The White House. The photos that are up in many locations are not the official photo, and were not released by the White House. ARS, OCIO, Policy and Information Assurance Branch (PIAB) will keep in touch with the USDA Office of Communications regarding the official photos. As soon as there is updated information to share, PIAB will send an e-mail update to all Administrative Officers.</p>

Top 5 SOP's	<p>1. Foreign visitor - from early Invitation to date they arrive to departure, including updating the portal ticket</p> <p>2. Incoming Agreement - from Proposal to funding (NIFA, SCRI grant)</p> <p>3. Foreign, Sponsored Travel (Authorization to Voucher with forms)</p> <p>4. New Employee LincPass and eAuthentication - how to get these set up</p> <p>5. Personnel - LA and Permanent Hiring - writing the PD's, classification, getting it posted, interviewing, making the selection, EOD,</p>	7/13/2017	7/26/2017	The SOP Challenge has concluded, and the team is hard at work to go through the requests.
Actually valuing your employees	<p>ARS employees have faced tremendous pressure this past year, which includes the possible reassignment or elimination of over 700 positions. Throughout the FY18 budget process, we have been constantly reminded, over & over again, how vitally important and valued we employees are. When one considers how valuable something is, it is most often realized in the little thingshe things that don't really seem to matter, but when considered in the light of how one perceives value, they are a great indicator of just how much someone values something. For instance, if I had a valuable work of art, you would seriously question how much I really value it if I just left it in the garage, unprotected, collecting dust & exposed to the elements. Take, for instance, the practice we have grown accustomed to over the past 15 or 20 years of early release from work on days preceding major holidays. This year, we received no such release before Memorial Day.</p>	7/3/2017	7/26/2017	<p>7/17/2017 - Thank you for your post. It tugged at our heartstrings because, ultimately, all any of us wants is to be valued for our hard work and our contributions. We may be biased, but we believe ARS is one of the best agencies in the Federal Government!</p> <p>Sometimes, however, it is hard to express individual appreciation and value to a staff of 7000 people dispersed over 90 locations...and maybe we forget to say "thank you" often enough. So...thank you for all you do!! Early releases are issued from the White House and then the Department. Every Administration brings with it a new philosophy and new practices with many changes, and we are finding out together that early releases before holidays do not seem to be part of the protocol for this Administration as of yet."</p>

	<p>"No matter," most of us surmised, "July 4th is coming, and it is on a Tuesday. Surely the administration will reward us for our commitment and work ethic--even during these trying times--by giving us the Monday preceding off (as they have done in the past) or by at least giving us 4 hours early leave on Monday." Again, our optimism & trust was punched in the face, kicked, and spit on by no such gesture of goodwill. What makes it even worse: We have been given no indication that this "goodwill" early release would not be given. It has come to be a common thing, something almost expected. If you really did have a shred of respect for your employees, the very LEAST you could do is provide us with a brief e-mail explaining why it won't be happening anymore. Your words say one thing; unfortunately, we can't hear them, because your actions are way too loud.</p>			
Permanent Non-Competitive Reassignment	<p>Is the recent vacancy advertisement (Ft Collins RLs) part of the restructuring of ARS due to budgetary constraints?</p>	6/23/2017	7/17/2017	<p>7/5/2017 - We expect a Fiscal Year 2018 Budget FAQ that answers this question by the end of the week. The FAQ will be available on the "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/Administrators%20Corner/Pages/Budget.aspx" Administrator's Corner FY18 Budget site on Axon . 7/14/2017 - The FAQ has been posted to the link above on Axon.</p>

Human Resources	<p>In an effort to help the Human Resources department and the locations, I propose offering a type of program that would allow a selected group of Administrative Assistants at the location level to code/process their location's personnel actions in the portal. This program would allow this select group of Administrative Assistants a chance to learn about coding and processing, assist the heavy workload Human Resources is having difficulty overcoming, and perhaps allow Administrative Assistants a chance to gain useful experience to further their government career goals. The group of Administrative Assistants chosen should be individuals who have demonstrated an interest in Human Resources, learn quickly, and can work with little to no direct supervision. They should be able to complete their tasks with less than 5% in error. This program in no way should be seen as an effort to replace the Human Resources department, but should be seen as a useful mechanism to improve the quality and quantity of production and reduce some of the negative issues between locations and HR.</p>	6/23/2017	7/26/2017	<p>7/26/2017 - AFM is always looking for ways to be more efficient, and capitalizing on some of the great Administrative Assistants, or any other interested employees, we have at the locations is very intriguing. We did some research and found out some interesting facts about HR Processing. HR Processing is one of our high-touch, high volume functions, with 50 – 100 portal tickets generated every day. Unfortunately, according to the Office of Personnel Management's regulations, HR work must be completed by individuals encumbering positions within the GS-200 series (that's the classification series governing HR folks).</p>
				<p>We're sorry to report that we could not find a way to get around this mandate. What we can recommend is that Administrative Assistants consider applying for details as HR Assistants when advertised. Or, if a full-time detail is not possible, there are other possibilities for Administrative Assistants (or anyone else) who have the time and enthusiasm to help. Check with your Administrative Officer to explore opportunities, such as participating in any of the "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/AFM%20Assessment%20Hub/default.aspx" target="_blank">ACES projects . Thank you for the suggestion and keep them coming!</p>

Search in Y2C, are there instructions how to?	Are there instructions how to search or sort responses, comments, or ideas in Y2C? Sometimes I'd like to see only items about 1 topic or see the most recent responses or comments in descending order. Also, why does nothing on Y2C have the date submitted, responded, or commented?	6/23/2017	7/5/2017	<p>7/5/2017 - Hello, thanks for your questions. We'll do our best to respond! To search within Y2C, click on the Ideas tab, then type your key word or words into the Search box in the middle of the page. Then click the blue Search button. Below the search box, there are two filter options, so filter by category type or status. Some of the dates you mentioned do exist, but the team will try to add the date (manually) that we responded in the future to our responses like we did on this one. The date the Idea is submitted is shown on the Idea page when you click the Idea title, and comments show dates as "one day ago" or "about a month ago." The new Your Two Cents is a commercial off the shelf software, so some of the features are built in and we don't have the option to change them. This is one of those things. For more Y2C instructions, please check out the "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/Employee%20Tools/Documents/Y2C%202%20User%20Manual.pdf">User Manual on the "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/Employee%20Tools/Pages/Y2C.aspx">Y2C page on Axon .</p>
Remember to do what you were never told about!	Why does a certain travel office send a bold, large, e-mail telling us to remember to do something - when that office never even told us that it was needed or required in the first place? And attaches a replacement form, and says we have to re-do all of them that were already submitted, and then 60 seconds later sends a 2nd version!	6/22/2017	8/2/2017	<p>8/2/2017 - Thanks for the Y2C submission. Based on the comments, we are not exactly sure what specific travel office or event is being referenced. However, the comments were circulated among various travel supervisors to make them aware of the concern that was raised regarding a perceived lack of proper communication. We are hopeful that this higher level of awareness will help to improve communications between the referenced travel office and the customers.</p>

TT royalties	From the ARS OTT annual report (FY15), there are no royalties returned to ARS or the Location; only to the inventors (25%). This policy should be reviewed to provide more incentives for patenting & licensing ARS technology.	6/22/2017	8/9/2017	8/9/17: You're correct that the inventor(s) receive 25% of the royalties, but the remainder does stay in ARS—it goes to the Office of Technology Transfer to help pay the fees associated with patenting. <inline> Also, ARS locations benefit from royalty money through the "https://www.ars.usda.gov/office-of-technology-transfer/news-reports/">Innovation Fund . All permanent Cat 1, 4 and 6 SYs are eligible to apply; awards are up to \$25,000. That's a pretty a solid incentive for creating and developing new ARS technologies!
congressional hearings	Could the URLs to the House and Senate hearings be posted so people can view our Secretary and Administrator (and others) testimony and Q&A? Thanks!	6/22/2017	7/5/2017	7/5/2017 - Great idea! We created a Congressional Briefings page on Axon with links to hearings that Dr. Jacobs-Young has participated in, as well as links to the committees that hosted the briefings. You can find the new page linked from the "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/Administrators%20Corner/Pages/Home.aspx">Administrator's Corner on Axon : "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/Administrators%20Corner/Pages/Congressional-Briefings.aspx">https://axon.ars.usda.gov/Administrators%20Corner/Pages/Congressional-Briefings.aspx
Test -HG	Do not publish	6/21/2017	NULL	NULL
technology transfer value	We encourage to work towards patenting our work and then transferring the technology to industry. The tech transfer office handles the patents and licensing agreements. We recently asked for the data on patents and licensing numbers/value for the location - and we were met with...silence. What is the value of the ARS intellectual property portfolio?	6/15/2017	8/9/2017	7/31/2017 - We checked with the Office of Technology Transfer and they said they have always been happy to provide this information to a location when asked. Annual "https://www.ars.usda.gov/office-of-technology-transfer/tt-reports/">tech transfer reports can be found on OTT's website. Each Area Office has a Tech Transfer Coordinator you can contact, and you can also reach out to "https://www.ars.usda.gov/people-locations/people-list-offices/?modeCode=04-02-00-00">OTT directly . Please do try again; this information is readily available.
Test Idea - Don't Publish	Heather Test	6/14/2017	NULL	NULL

Axon Interoperability	Would it be possible to set Axon up so that once I log into the overall site, I can move freely inside Axon and open files without having to re-enter my ID and password every time I change pages? The system is very cumbersome in its current format.	6/13/2017	9/6/2017	<p>9/6/2017 - Sorry to hear you are experiencing this. You should not have to enter a user ID and password again once logged into Axon. There is something going on with your local configuration and we encourage you to talk to your local IT Specialist and have them address this issue or contact the ARS Helpdesk if they need support to correct this. OCIO released a memo with recommended configuration for user-based enforcement of smart card logons. If recommendations are followed, users at most location will experience a single sign-on environment with Y2C and Axon. Some Locations have chosen to go a different route, and users will need to work with their local IT Specialists if they are having an issue. The memo is posted on the https://axon.ars.usda.gov/OCIO/OCIOCommunicationsPDFs/2017-8-11%20ARS%20OCIO%20Administrative%20Advisory%20-%20User-Based%20Enforcement%20of%20Smart%20Card%20Logon.pdf>OCIO Communications page on Axon .</p>
				<p>For now, Y2C and Axon use USDA\first.last credentials to login. OCIO is discussing moving to e-Authentication on those systems in the future, but we don't have a date for you just yet. If you have any questions, please first talk to your local IT staff.</p>

FY18 Proposed Budget - Facility Funding	Based on the FY18 President's proposed budget, it states under the Justification of Increases and Decreases that "The Agency is not requesting funding under its Buildings and Facilities account." Does this statement allow units/locations the ability not to spend the mandatory 4% repair costs out of their allocation and divert the funds to offset the estimated reduction next year?	6/6/2017	7/17/2017	7/17/2017 - Based on the 2018 President's Budget Proposal, ARS is not in line to receive additional Building and Facility funds. The B&F fund is the funding the Agency receives for large-scale facility modernization, and is separate and distinct funding from what ARS refers to as Repair and Maintenance (R&M) funding. The Agency funding for R&M comes to us as part of our "normal" appropriations for salaries and expenses, thus B&F and R&M are not interchangeable. The R&M fund level could be impacted by any across-the-board budget reduction that occurs (this is not planned at the moment), but is not impacted by changes to the B&F funding levels. The location level 4% R&M funding set aside is an Agency policy, and adjustments to the policy could be considered if funding reductions are enacted. It's important to remember that the need for facility safety and security does not diminish in importance during lean budget times. Our challenge will be to make the most of our research investment while safely maintaining the facilities that support our research.
On AgLearn to-do list? Nope.	Two recent (May 2017) messages from ARS-Administrator indicated that an item had been placed on our AgLearn to-do list. No such items have shown up on my (SY) to-do list. Is this an isolated issue? Are others having the same problem?	5/26/2017	7/26/2017	7/26/17 - Great question! We're not exactly sure which training you were referring to... maybe the Scientific Integrity Policy Training announced May 25? ARS works with the Department (who owns AgLearn) to upload training requirements into thousands of employee's AgLearn profiles. Sometimes that process takes some time, and we might beat the Department to the starting gate by a day or two. We're sorry if this causes confusion, but, if this happens, we recommend to check back into your AgLearn account in a couple of days. If the training requirement is still not there, contact our ARS AgLearn POC, "mailto:Sherrell.Brooks@ars.usda.gov">Sherrell.Brooks@ars.usda.gov , and she will be happy to research it for you.

fix link from old Y2C page	The link to the new Y2C page from the old page is slightly wrong. The text shown on the page is correct, but the actual link has an extra period at the end, so you get an error if you click on it. (correct link = https://y2c.arsnet.usda.gov/dashboard.aspx , incorrect link = https://y2c.arsnet.usda.gov/dashboard.aspx.)	5/26/2017	5/30/2017	NULL
Raising the Agency IPSC - offset a bit of the proposed budget cut by increasing the rate to do business	In view of the proposed FY18 budget and cuts to USDA, has ARS reviewed increasing the Indirect Program Support Costs from the current 10%? Currently this is significantly lower than other agencies.	5/23/2017	8/30/2017	8/16/17: Good question! Whether or not to increase the Indirect Program Support Cost rate has in fact been discussed by ARS leadership for many years. In 2012, ARS revised the P&P for charging IPSC on soft funds. While a number of things were changed at that time, the Agency chose to continue the long-standing policy of charging IPSC at a rate of 10 percent of the gross agreement total on all incoming reimbursable and trust fund agreements, cooperative agreements, and grants (with a few exceptions). While raising the rate might seem like an easy way to offset budget reductions, IPSC is considered one-time/temporary funding, not permanent funding—thus we can't count on it from year to year. An increase in temporary funds would not make up for any potential loss in permanent resources. It would be difficult to sustain the agency's long-term research programs on temporary funds. ARS has actually been challenged on multiple occasions by Congress to reduce our IPSC rate below the current 10 percent. ARS has been able to successfully make the case that our IPSC rate is fair and justifiable.

Include Idea Title and Content in Automated Emails	I just submitted 2 other ideas, and this one is a follow-up. When you post an Idea, the automated email message from Y2C is generic: subject = "Thank you for your suggestion", body = "Thanks for sending in your suggestion. Your idea will be reviewed and published within 2 business days." This message should contain - at minimum - the title of the specific Idea that was submitted, and ideally both the title and the body text of the Idea. Otherwise, the automated email is not very useful - it just tells you on what date you posted an Idea but not what that Idea was about.	5/19/2017	5/23/2017	NULL
Make Comments Searchable/Discoverable	Currently, you can search through the Ideas for a keyword. It would be helpful to do the same with Comments. For example - with the first 8 Ideas posted as of 5/19/2017 - I searched for the term "FMAD", which I knew was used in one of the Comments but not in the body of any of the Ideas. There were no hits for this term. So - please make Comments discoverable, either as part of every Ideas search or as a toggled/selectable option ("Search Ideas Only", "Search Comments Only", "Search All Y2C").	5/19/2017	5/23/2017	NULL
Feature Suggestion - "My Comments"	There is a "My Ideas" list in the user's profile but no equivalent "My Comments" list. Personally, I posted many more comments in the old Y2C than I did ideas. So, a quick way to track a user's comments would be helpful.	5/19/2017	5/23/2017	NULL
test	test	5/18/2017	5/22/2017	NULL

Anonymous?	How can submissions to this site be anonymous anymore since we now have to log in with our ID, and it recognizes us with, "Hi, John" and with "USDA/John.smith" on the page? It appears that the Y2C committee can now find out who posted an idea, comment, etc.	5/17/2017	5/24/2017	<p>You are correct; Y2C is not completely anonymous anymore. As we indicated during the "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/Administrators%20Corner/Pages/InformEngage.aspx">kickoff webinar and on the "https://y2c.arsnet.usda.gov/InfoLinks.aspx">About Y2C page, Y2C is now linked to the Enterprise Active Directory and you will be "logged in" to the site when you are using it. Your name will show on your end but will not be visible to other users if you select the check boxes that indicate that you prefer to remain anonymous. You can see this in action when you peruse the new site some of the ideas have a person's name attached and some do not. This is also explained in the "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/Employee%20Tools/Documents/Y2C%202%20User%20Manual.pdf">Y2C user manual. If you choose the anonymous option, your name will also not appear to the Y2C team in our administrators' console, but we do have the option of generating a report that will show who is using the system at any given time.</p>
Why I serve	... although I am not a scientist, I get to provide assistance to those who are changing the world and making it a better place for the generations to come. To all the Scientists and Technicians ... Keep up the amazing work!	5/16/2017	5/16/2017	Thanks for your contribution, and for your service!

<p>August salary lapse impacts CATS accuracy near end of fiscal year</p>	<p>The salary lapse report is usually done three times per year, in April, June and August. During WBSC/EBSC and HQ review of the lapse report, which takes about three weeks, SAMS (the salary system) cannot be updated by location staff. This creates an issue in August, when the CATS status of funds report is sent out weekly and the fundholders are relying on it to manage their remaining funds accurately. The SAMS salary information makes up a significant part of the total spending in CATS, greater than 50% of the total in many accounts, so if SAMS is inaccurate, CATS will be inaccurate. Due to the August salary lapse, for about three weeks in August, the salary projections cannot be updated to reflect any changes, although fundholders are relying on CATS weekly available balances to spend down their funds. So at least two or three of the August weekly CATS status of funds reports are missing salary updates. Then when HQ have completed their review and locations are finally able to input their three weeks' worth of changes in SAMS, it causes the CATS available balances to change significantly, after the fundholders thought they had already spent down their available balances to a prudent level.</p>	<p>5/15/2017</p>	<p>6/21/2017</p>	<p>Thank you for the suggestion. We have been working on expediting the salary lapse approval time and in the past year we have been able to review and approve salary lapse within 5 business days of the final due date. This review and approval timeframe does depend on the accuracy of the reports when submitted. Invalid and incorrect CRIS project numbers often cause delays, so we appreciate all of the extra efforts the locations and BSCs have put in to making sure the reports are accurate – this really helps with the approval timeframe. A best practice is to make sure SAMS is updated to the latest pay period available in FMMI. Once salary lapse is submitted, update CATS immediately with both the salary and the 80% salary lapse cost. This will give the fund holder immediate access to their 20% MU share. We would encourage the AO and RL to work closely with the Financial Technician during the July/August timeframe to ensure the correct hours, EOD dates and separation dates are captured. This will help to reduce any adjustments that need to be made as well as ensure an accurate status of funds report in August.</p>
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	<p>The fundholders are, understandably, dismayed. They then have little time left to remedy the situation before the August 31 deadline for routine spending. The scheduling of the August salary lapse creates inaccuracies in CATS precisely when it's being relied on the most to be as accurate as possible. Suggestion: in the future, schedule the salary lapse reports in March/May/July or February/April/June. That way, in August SAMS can be updated immediately with any changes and the weekly August CATS status of funds reports will be more accurate. This will help the fundholders manage their remaining funds accurately by the August 31 deadline for routine spending.</p>			<p>August is a difficult time for salary lapse, especially since many management units (MU) still have summer students on board and it is quite challenging to keep up with varying hours as well as the separation dates. However, we find running the final salary lapse in August, while challenging, is also beneficial for the MUs. The August lapse allows for the most flexibility in adjusting EOD dates, separation dates, projections and offsets. If we run a final salary lapse report earlier than August, a unit could end up with the issue of having to find funds at the last minute due to an erroneous EOD date or a position being filled earlier than anticipated. We will continue to work with the BSCs and locations to improve the salary lapse process and appreciate all suggestions.</p>
electronic notebooks	<p>What is the status of electronic notebook availability? Is it Location or Area dependent?</p>	5/12/2017	7/5/2017	<p>7/5/2017 - OCIO manages an enterprise account for Docollab, the online solution for Electronic Laboratory Notebooks (ELN). The \$60 licenses are added to the enterprise account when they are requested and are renewed annually. To request an individual license, users should follow the process for new licenses outlined on the "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/Science%20Links/Pages/Home.aspx" target="_blank">Science Links page on Axon which includes having Administrative Officers complete the "https://e.arsnet.usda.gov/sites/ARS/IT/BPA/">BPA form on SharePoint for new purchase requests. New accounts will be created and available shortly thereafter and users will receive a welcome email with their password. As a side note, the ARS Enterprise Wireless Network (EWN) is available for all locations, but each location needs to purchase their own Wireless Access Point (WAP) which will be configured by the ARS Network Operations Center (NOC).</p>

				<p>For more questions about wireless access at locations, local IT Specialists can contact "mailto:noc@ars.usda.gov">noc@ars.usda.gov . (University locations should also contact local IT for their options.) Quick Links: - Electronic notebooks Info: "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/Science%20Links/Pages/Home.aspx">Axon's Science Links - Electronic notebooks help: "mailto:helpdesk@ars.usda.gov">helpdesk@ars.usda.gov - Wireless config: "mailto:noc@ars.usda.gov">noc@ars.usda.gov (For IT Specialists) - Purchase new licenses: "https://e.arsnet.usda.gov/sites/ARS/IT/BPA/">BPA SharePoint Site (For AOs) Hope this clears up some questions on ELN, EWN, WAP, & NOC!</p>
FY17 budget - when will we get the final total for each CRIS project?	<p>Now that the FY17 budget has been signed into law, when can we expect to know the final FY17 budget total for CRIS projects? Big purchases are getting squeezed into a short period between getting the final budget and acquisition deadlines. It seems risky to make a large purchase without knowing the total budget.</p>	5/11/2017	5/24/2017	<p>Thanks for your question, which we are sure many others have as well. While a budget has been signed, we cannot actually allocate or spend the funding until the Agency receives the apportionment, which equates to the check being in the bank. Once the apportionment is received, the Budget Staff will work to expedite the allocations down to the project level as soon as possible. We anticipate this to take place within the next couple of weeks.</p>
I serve because...	<p>Public service is one of the highest callings. I believe in government and believe the public deserves to trust we are working hard and in the most efficient and effective manner possible. They should feel good about how their taxpayer dollars are spent. In ARS those dollars are spent working to feed the world! And research has shown that annual rates of return on ag research can be as high as 60% - see attached report from our sister agency the Economic Research Service, for example.</p>	5/10/2017	5/12/2017	<p>Thanks for your contribution, and thanks for your service!</p>

Concur sessions constantly time out	<p>When using Concur if you are distracted for a couple of minutes, the system will kick you out and you lose your work. In some cases, even if you catch it and select "I need more time", you will lose information that you have already filled in. I use a variety of on-line banking and investment websites and none of them log out this quickly.</p>	5/10/2017	5/31/2017	<p>Thank you for using Your Two Cents! We understand that system timeouts can be exceptionally frustrating when you're trying to get your work done. The 15 minute timeout is mandated by GSA as a security feature. USDA has requested a change; however, GSA has determined that a period of more than 15 minutes of inactivity poses a significant security threat to government systems. ConcurGov contains Personally Identifiable Information (PII) - information that can be used to uniquely identify an individual. Proper safeguards must be taken to protect against unauthorized access to PII, to include the 15 minute timeout in ConcurGov. If you find that timeouts are happening before 15 minutes has passed, please check with your local IT staff. Sometimes there are firewall settings that cause systems to timeout sooner than expected. If you continue to have issues please contact your Business Service Center Travel Specialist with these details so that we can try to isolate the problem. 1. Web Browser used and version 2. Approximate time of the occurrence 3. ConcurGov screen/activity when timeout occurred</p>
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My faith defines who I am...	<p>Before enlisting (b) (6) a week after turning 17 yrs old, I moved over 12 times - attending 9 schools in my 11 primary academic years. I had the incredible opportunity to live for several years in remote parts of the Middle East; often in towns without paved roads. Being immersed in different cultures, and always being "the new kid" gave me a tremendous respect for other cultures, brought humility, and shed light on how blessed we are as a nation. The experiences inspired me to do what I could to give something back. I was the first in my entire family to earn a degree after serving in the military. I have been so blessed, and my life is guided and defined by my faith; two scriptures in particular: "For of him unto whom much is given much is required..." and "...behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God."</p>	5/10/2017	5/12/2017	Thanks for your contribution, and thanks for your service!
I serve because public service at USDA is in my family ... and I love Abraham Lincoln!	<p>I am a fourth-generation USDA employee (by way of my (b) (6) with one of ARS's predecessor agencies, the Bureau of Plant Industry). Public service is a noble calling, especially in an agency like ours where agricultural research and information can and does enrich lives on a local, national, and global scale. Our science helps feed the world. It is also great to work with wonderful colleagues at a historic location - the National Agricultural Library in Beltsville whose mission was specifically called for in the legislation signed by President Abraham Lincoln on May 15, 1862, that established the USDA. (Check out the first part of Section 3 of "An Act to Establish a Department of Agriculture" at "https://www.nal.usda.gov/act-establish-department-agriculture">https://www.nal.usda.gov/act-establish-department-agriculture .) Happy Public Service Recognition Week! #PSRW</p>	5/9/2017	5/10/2017	Thanks for your contribution, and thanks for your service!

allow Area specific ideas	It seemed to me that many Y2C posts were specific for Areas/Locations, maybe posters could be allowed to choose a selection that marks the idea as ARS-wide versus Area-wide vs. Location-specific.	5/9/2017	5/12/2017	Thanks for your idea!
Y2C needs to be able to handle smaller browser windows	I went to the Challenges section and I had to maximize my browser window to see all of the buttons. Y2C needs to adjust to smaller browser windows.	5/9/2017	5/12/2017	Thanks for your idea!
LincPass on Y2C	Will Y2C be configured to use LincPass to login? At our location we have users who have the 'Smart Card required' box checked for their user account in Active Directory so they don't know their password.	5/9/2017	9/6/2017	<p>9/6/2017 - For now, Y2C and Axon use USDA\first.last credentials to login. OCIO is discussing moving to e-Authentication on those systems in the future, but we don't have a date for you just yet. OCIO released a memo with recommended configuration for user-based enforcement of smart card logons. If recommendations are followed, users at most location will experience a single sign-on environment with Y2C and Axon. Some Locations have chosen to go a different route, and users will need to work with their local IT Specialists if they are having an issue. The memo is posted on the "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/OCIO/OCIOCommunicationsPDFs/2017-8-11%20ARS%20OCIO%20Administrative%20Advisory%20-%20User-Based%20Enforcement%20of%20Smart%20Card%20Logon.pdf" >OCIO Communications page on Axon . If you have any questions, please first talk to your local IT staff.</p>

Status of Hiring in ARS	<p>There are several vacancies at support, technical, management, and SES levels within ARS. When we ask about the status of a search (specifically SES position) that was conducted (interviews completed), we get the "hiring freeze" answer which is outdated. Could our Administrator or HR give us an update on the status of hiring for vacancies in the field? Thank you!</p>	5/9/2017	6/6/2017	<p>Thank you for your inquiry. We know with the budget uncertainty, hiring is a subject on everyone's mind. USDA was included in a federal-wide hiring freeze which was lifted, but then subject to a subsequent USDA-wide hiring freeze that is still in place. We continue to work to keep all of ARS in the loop on the status of hiring. There have been a number of communications in the last few weeks, and we are collecting all the information in one place with up-to-date information and you can access that here on Axon: "</p> <p>https://axon.ars.usda.gov/Employee%20Tools/Pages/Hiring-Freeze.aspx target="_blank"></p> <p>https://axon.ars.usda.gov/Employee%20Tools/Pages/Hiring-Freeze.aspx . You can leave any questions you might have in the comments of this idea and we'll do our best to find answers for you. Guidance seems to be changing often, so monitor email and/or this site on Axon for the latest!</p>
I serve because...	<p>I want to give back to this great country who has given me so much. My parents brought me to America as a child, and helped me adapt to it. I appreciated their effort and I learned to appreciate everything this country stands for, One nation under God with liberty and justice for all. Shortly after high school I (b) (6) . I joined USDA ARS almost three years ago, and have enjoyed serving my country once again. It is a great experience to work with all kinds of people who do their best for the better of our country. Thank you all for your great service!</p>	5/9/2017	5/10/2017	<p>Thanks for your comment, and thanks for your service!</p>
Making Green Revolutions!	<p>I serve because I believe, like Norman Borlaug, that "Food is the moral right of all who are born into this world."</p>	5/9/2017	5/10/2017	<p>Thanks for your comment, and thanks for your service!</p>
I serve because...	<p>I like knowing that we are making a difference in the lives of actual people. I like not feeling like we have to sell something to be successful. What we create/discover is for everyone. Also... I really like to eat.</p>	5/9/2017	5/10/2017	<p>Thanks for your comment, and thanks for your service!</p>

I serve because....	The mission of ARS resonates with me and I want to contribute to an effective and efficient government.	5/9/2017	5/10/2017	Thanks for your comment, and thanks for your service!
I serve because....	we help feed the world.	5/9/2017	5/10/2017	Thanks for your comment, and thanks for your service!
Old Y2C	Will the Ideas in the old Y2C that don't have responses ever be responded to? Can those un-addressed Ideas be transferred to the new Y2C and dealt with?	5/8/2017	5/12/2017	Thanks for trying out the new site and the great question. The Y2C Team spent lots of time discussing the exact same question. We felt that so much changed while the old site was down that most of the questions may not be relevant to our current state. For example, questions about recruitment and hiring that were asked a year ago when we weren't in a hiring freeze. We recognize that there are some ideas/questions that are still very relevant and we encourage you to use the new system to restart the conversation.
Use ad hoc focus groups to help address specific problems	Create a mechanism within the Y2C system to facilitate the formation of ad hoc focus groups. These groups could help answer questions or resolve problems that would benefit from the contributions of special knowledge experts within the Agency. Perhaps a button or field could be made active whenever the Y2C staff would like to receive the names of potential focus group volunteers. Those names could be vetted by the Y2C staff and line management, and if approved, be tasked as part of the ad hoc focus group to address a particular problem or question. This would allow more participation in the improvement process, leverage ARS talent across the U.S. and limit the need to a long-term time commitment.	5/4/2017	8/9/2017	We like the idea of ad hoc groups and use them to get all kinds of things done—including here on Y2C. One of our first Y2C ad hoc groups studied the issue of authorship for technicians and support scientists; that group included members of both of those groups and led to updated language in the " https://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/ppweb/pdf/152-02ars.pdf ">P&P on authorship . Since the new Y2C is an off-the shelf software product, we do have limited control over what functionalities we can add to the page—but we are making use of the " https://y2c.arsnet.usda.gov/default.aspx?toTab=challenges ">Challenges section to solicit input from the field on a range of issues, and will definitely continue to tap people in the field for their expertise when it will benefit the Agency. Thanks for the tip!

Include ARS wide call announcements on Axon	I was hoping to participate in the Y2C relaunch event, but my (and my coworkers) event in Outlook did not include connection information. Would it be possible to also post announcements for ARS wide calls to Axon, and possibly the Axon calendar?	5/4/2017	5/4/2017	You're right, we missed adding the webinar instructions to the Axon calendar. We'll make sure to add them in the future and apologize that this one wasn't there. We heard that some people couldn't see the login information on their calendar appointment, and we're trying to figure out why some people could see it and some couldn't. We'll make sure that we add the webinar URL into the calendar appointment "Location" field next time. Thanks for writing in!
Challenge Response	I like the idea of challenges in this new system where we can post responses to specific questions. Best practices to get your voice heard: Tell people what you would like to see. Envision the future. Criticism alone is not helpful Give examples Support your coworkers and be kind Respond in sentence case as typing in ALL CAPS portrays yelling or a negative feeling 	5/3/2017	5/12/2017	Thanks for your idea!
Challenge Response	I like the idea of challenges in this new system where we can post responses to specific questions. Best practices to get your voice heard: Tell us what you would like to see. Envision the future. Criticism alone is not helpful Give examples Support your coworkers and be kind Respond in sentence case as typing in ALL CAPS portrays yelling or a negative feeling 	5/3/2017	5/3/2017	
Challenge Response	I like the idea of challenges in this new system where we can post responses to specific questions. Best Practices to get your voice heard: Tell us what you would like to see. Envision the future. Criticism alone is not helpful Give examples Support your coworkers and be kind Respond in sentence case as typing in ALL CAPS portrays yelling or a negative feeling 	5/3/2017	5/3/2017	NULL

ARMPS Guidance	Each year ARMPS guidance is issued and a concern is the number of attachments and tracking down specific information to complete ARMPS. For FY18 there is a total of 10 attachments. First, would it be possible to condense this in some way? For instance, could Encl 5 MU Talking Points; or at least Encl 8 Footnotes be part of the Encl 9 BSC Supplemental Guidance? Second, for a new location ARS employee tasked with developing ARMPS, would they be aware that locations are not responsible for Encl 2 State of the Area and Encl 3 Guidance for SRMP SharePoint site? Perhaps marking such guidance as "Encl # - Area Only" may aid in clarity for field locations.	5/3/2017	6/15/2017	Thanks for writing in and for the great questions. Over the last few years, we have gone back and forth on the number of enclosures and whether to consolidate or keep them separate. There are pros and cons to both, but overall the decision was made to keep them separate for easy access. Many of the enclosures are not needed by everyone, so it is much easier to click on one enclosure and immediately find what is needed, rather than scrolling through a rather large consolidated document. The idea of labeling the enclosures as "Area Only" is brilliant, and we will be looking to incorporate that in next year's guidance. Thanks for the thoughtful suggestions!
ARMPS Guidance	Each year ARMPS guidance is issued and a concern is the number of attachments and tracking down specific information to complete ARMPS. For FY18 there is a total of 10 attachments. First, would it be possible to condense this in some way? For instance, could Encl 5 MU Talking Points; or at least Encl 8 Footnotes be part of the Encl 9 BSC Supplemental Guidance? Second, for a new location ARS employee tasked with developing ARMPS, would they be aware that locations are not responsible for Encl 2 State of the Area and Encl 3 Guidance for SRMP SharePoint site? Perhaps marking such guidance as "Encl # - Area Only" may aid in clarity for field locations.	5/3/2017	5/3/2017	
Challenge Response	I like the idea of challenges in this new system where we can post responses to specific questions. Best Practices to get your voice heard: Tell us what you would like to see. Envision the future. Criticism alone is not helpful Give examples Support your coworkers and be kind Respond in sentence case as typing in ALL CAPS portrays yelling or a negative feeling 	5/2/2017	5/2/2017	
Where does this go?	Does this go to the challenge?	5/2/2017	5/2/2017	NULL

ARS-wide Calendar	Often we get surprised by requests, new initiatives, directives or even events that occur on an annual schedule. It seems that it would be relatively straight-forward to develop an ARS Calendar that everyone would have access to and that people could post upcoming events and deadlines - perhaps place it on Axon (might get everyone using it on a daily basis). That way people can be prepared for things coming down the line and be less surprised by an email saying this needs to be done ASAP - (they tend to arrive usually when you are up to your eyes in it)	4/28/2017	5/3/2017	This is such a great idea that it already exists. The ARS calendar can be found "https://axon.ars.usda.gov/ARS%20Calendar/Pages/Home.aspx">here ; it's the rightmost mega menu button on Axon. Calendar updates can be sent to "mailto:axon@ars.usda.gov">axon@ars.usda.gov .
ARS Webinars	Our location has seen a great improvement in communication through Webinars. One suggestion would be to send out the communication of the upcoming webinars more ahead of time so we can ensure saving the date.	4/20/2017	NULL	NULL
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New Leader Program notification	It is great that the Agency provides opportunities for training such as the New Leader Program. However, in many cases, the notices do not get forwarded to appropriate personnel. Therefore, it would be beneficial if these notices could be more widely distributed within the Agency.	4/18/2017	5/3/2017	We agree and have provided this suggestion to the people in charge of this program so announcements will be sent to a wider audience next time. Thanks for your feedback.